

Darkness pervaded the small dank cell where a young skeletal man lay hunkered on a filthy decrepit mattress while a storm raged outside. Brilliant flashes of lightening bathed the rotten cell in an eerie light that caused shadows to take on a life all their own. However, the loud claps of thunder and flashes of light had no effect on the young man that stared blankly at the slime covered stone wall. He was lost somewhere else and even the Dementors that roamed the prison of Azkaban could no longer feed off him.

This was no ordinary prisoner slowly slipping away from reality; this was the former hero of the wizarding world, the famous Boy-Who-Lived, Harry Potter. No one would recognize him now; no one even knew what he looked like since no one had visited him in the last year since the day he was sentenced to 3 consecutive life terms by the Wizengamot. His body was wasting away from the lack of food and exercise. The only life the inmate showed was at meal times twice a day to eat the sorry excuse of soup the prison provided, then to use the not so private privy in a corner of his cell. His once brilliant emerald green eyes were now bland and void as he repeated his daily ritual, unconcerned with anything else surrounding him. Back to the center of the cell he would move and seat himself on the grimy floor and lose himself in a trance reliving every minute of his unhappy life. Inevitably his thoughts would drift back to that one moment in time when he had lost everything.

It was an open and shut case for everyone that was involved, Cornelius Fudge, Minister of Magic for Great Britain, made sure of that. The Dursleys were dead by his own hands it seems, as young Harry was found with their blood all over him, Mrs. Figg and Percy Weasley were also found dead at the scene, killed by the Avada Kedavra curse which after investigation was found to be cast by Harry's wand. The boy was unconscious and sporting several broken ribs, a dislocated shoulder and a severe concussion when they found him but he only received cursory healing, begrudgingly by his school healer Madame Pomfrey, to get him to trial as soon as possible. No one cared what had actually happened. No one questioned how he had come by his injuries or the pain he was under during the trial. They mocked his pain, thought he deserved worse. No one ever questioned how Mrs. Figg or Percy Weasley happened to be there that night.

Minister Fudge was beyond ecstatic that he was finally able to prove to the wizarding public that he had been right about the awful boy, such a trouble maker. Gleeful to the point of insanity that he would be getting rid of this thorn in his side, the boy that caused so many problems for him, the boy who by his very existence threatened his role as minister. Fudge gloated to everyone who would listen, mainly the press, about how he had known all along the boy was evil, constantly lying and trying to cover his tracks blaming his heinous deeds on others. Even Dumbledore, the greatest wizard of the age couldn't stand against the overwhelming evidence of Harry's crime, he was so distraught over his charge seeming to have taken the dark path that his mind became befuddled and he couldn't think beyond the present. He was severely disappointed in the boy and made it known to Harry more than once. Even when he looked at the boy it was with such anger that Harry couldn't face the man. His fury however, was nothing compared to that of the Weasleys. Harry had thought he was part of the family, loved and supported by them, how many times had they assured him he was one of their own, surely they would believe him, but when it came to one of their own blood, Percy, it was no comparison. They scorned him and shouted insults about him and his betrayal; they thirsted for revenge for the death of their true son. Coupled with this and Dumbledore's lack of support, Harry's heart broke, he was doomed and lost all hope, the last nail was hammered into Harry's coffin when he learned that Mrs. Figg, although a squib, was a relative of Madame Bones, the head of the Department of magical law Enforcement. So many against him, everyone he thought who had ever loved him or cared about him. They were the only ones that he trusted in his life, he considered them more family than his own blood relatives and now they were turning their backs on him. Left alone, must be fate for me to be alone and unloved the rest of my life, Harry thought, why does everyone hate me so? What did I ever do? I tried to keep everyone safe, I tried to be what they wanted but it never seems to work, WHY CAN'T I JUST BE NORMAL! He screamed in his head through the pain. He tried over and over to make them see his innocence through the burning pain in his heart, but they were blind by their hatred and grief. He felt like his broken heart was being torn out of his chest and he longed for death, anything that would make the pain cease.

All his friends, except Lupin of course testified against Harry. They said such awful things! 'We always new there was something strange about him,' 'He was never a normal child, always getting into trouble and dragging everyone along with him', 'He was given too much leeway due to his fame,' 'Always took advantage of his fame flaunting it and his money around whenever he had the chance,' Harry couldn't believe it! He never did anything like they were saying, but it didn't matter to those around, they were all fickle people. The same type that condemned him one minute then praised him the next in all his previous years at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, he was so used to it now with everything he had gone through, but he never expected his family to be that way. The Weasley's, Dumbledore and Granger had always stood by him, always backed him up, now they cast themselves in with the hate-sayers. He wondered why Lupin was no where around, was it time for the full moon, he had lost all track of time since the Department of Mysteries incident and Sirius' death, did Lupin think the same of him, he could only hope that he believed that Harry was innocent, this now became his lifeline. If Remus Lupin believed in him he could hold on. With his help maybe the truth about what happened at Privet Drive would finally come out.

For the short week he was at home with the Dursley's he was in severe depression over Sirius' death and didn't leave his room. Aunt Petunia would fix him a sandwich and put it through the cat flap in the door once a day, but he hadn't felt like eating.

Then that fateful night happened, Percy showed up trying to force him out of the house, supposedly on ministry business. Harry was suspicious of this, 'Why would Percy Weasley show up at his house?' There was no incident of underage magic and even if there was, Percy was not part of that department, he couldn't think of any reason why the ministry would just show up at his house. After asking Percy why he had come, Percy wouldn't say stating it was none of his business. Pretty iron considering this was his house and Percy was asking him to leave it. This made Harry even more suspicious and he tried to go back up to his room refusing to leave the house. Before he could register what was happening, his Uncle Vernon grabbed him roughly by the back of his shirt and threw him out the front door. To

his horror he looked up to find 10 Death Eaters approaching the house with their wands pointed directly at his head.

Harry watched in terror as Percy joined the ranks of Death Eaters and laughed when one of their numbers cast "Crucio" on Harry. Harry curled himself into a tight ball trying to protect against the pain ripping through him, he tried to resist screaming but eventually the intense pain won out and he writhed on the ground screaming as millions of white hot pokers seemed to burn him inside out. It continued for what seemed forever, and then finally the curse was lifted. The pain left him exhausted and immobile. He watched helplessly as Death Eaters dragged the Dursley's from the house kicking and screaming, then tortured them cruelly. They were taunting Harry and trying to get information from him for their Dark Lord. His relatives grew quiet and Harry was feared they were dead. He tried desperately to figure a way out of this for all of them but his mind was not working. From his position in front of the bushes he could see the still forms of his battered and bloody relatives and a whimper of despair escaped his throat at the thought of them dying because the Dark Lord chose him as his nemesis. Crawling weakly across the lawn he was able to lie besides his relatives and check for pulses. When he felt a weak pulse in all of them he breathed a sigh of relief and started trying to plan again, but he could see no way out. He didn't know how long since this had all started but was sure that by now the Ministry or the Order would have realized what was going on and shown up to help. Didn't the precious wards Dumbledore put so much faith in have some type of alarm to alert the Order? Couldn't the Ministry detect the use of the unforgiveables? Looking around the deserted street he felt a lump grow in the pit of his stomach. No one was there except the Death Eaters, no one would come to save him.

Growing tired of their 'game' Lucious Malfoy smirked at The-Boy-Who-Lived then walked forward with Harry's wand in hand and maliciously cast the killing curse at his relatives, in the blink of an eye they were gone from this world. The lifeless bodies lie still on the ground beside him, eyes staring blankly up at the heavens. Harry cried out in grief. He had never felt any love for the Dursley's but he didn't want them to die like this. Before Harry could think upon this anymore, intense pain shot through his body again and he was vaguely aware of many kicks and punches that he received in

between bouts of magical torture, the pain became unbearable and Harry prayed for death until he finally succumbed to blackness.

Mrs. Figg had heard noises coming from down the street as she was out walking and went to investigate them. She came to an abrupt stop at the end of the block when she saw at least a dozen Black Robed Death Eaters surrounding No. 4 Privet Drive. She knew she had to get help; there was certainly no way she could do this on her own. Frantically she turned to run back to her home to notify the Order when she was caught. The only mercy she received was a quick death.

Although Percy had joined the Death Eaters, he didn't realize he was only a pawn in their ultimate game. He learned this only too late. Voldemort smugly related to Percy how he needed Harry out of the way and discredited, and how Percy played right into his hands. What better way to discredit the boy than to have the hero of the wizarding world fall in the eyes of his admirers. It would be easy to manipulate. Hadn't the wizarding world already proven how fickle it was when it came to the boy. The Daily Prophet had set the ground work over the last 5 years, and after tonight they would all turn on Harry Potter, breaking the little resistance that had built since Potter started at Hogwarts.

Percy was horrified at how easily he had been tricked and wished he had listened to his family. His guilt and sorrow overwhelmed him at choosing so poorly. Now all he could wish for was forgiveness from the family that loved him so and grief that he would never see them again. He hoped against all hope that what he had set in motion today would right itself soon and silently asked for forgiveness from the boy that lay battered on the ground, the boy he had betrayed. So it was that Percy died knowing he had betrayed his family and the world for nothing, his ambition his own downfall.

Voldemort laughed cruelly at his own genius, his plan was working brilliantly. Percy had joined, then lured Harry out of the house, killed the boys relatives and Mrs. Figg with Harry's wand and now there would be no-one to prove otherwise. He trusted the Death Eaters that accompanied him. The others would never know, and that insolent boy would not interfere with his plans anymore. He only regretted not

getting the prophecy out of the boy, if he knew of it in the first place. That didn't matter now though. He would get the prophecy later and have the boy join him. He would be more than eager to join his side after spending time in Azkaban and being betrayed by all those he loved and cared for. Snapping out of his thoughts he realized his time here was short and the ministry would be coming soon to investigate the magic that was used here tonight. He would bide his time. Once Potter was sentenced and in Azkaban he would have plenty of time to find out the contents of the Prophecy. He gave his orders to his Death Eaters than disappeared.

Lucious smugly used the boy's wand to cast the dark mark above number 4 Privet Drive while Harry lay unconscious. Gathering the bodies of the Dursley's and Harry, they laid them out in the house and smeared the Dursley's blood over Harry. Then he carelessly placed the wand back in the boy's left hand. They left Mrs. Figg and Percy outside the front door, cleaned up any signs that they had been in the area and left just as they heard someone apparating nearby. Harry of course had no idea of everything happening; only a foggy pain filled memory.

During the trial Harry tried to plead with the court and his former adopted family to listen to him, to let him take Veritaserum so the truth would be known. When they shouted that down he asked that they view his memories in a pensieve, but was met with death glares. Everyone in the court room seemed hell bent on denying him any say in his own defense. He of course had a court appointed defense wizard but the unenthusiastic man asked few questions and quickly took his seat after asking only a few vague questions to each of the so called witness. Harry knew the man was more worried about his career after this trial than really defending him. For some reason they wouldn't even allow Harry on the stand to testify for himself, he argued again begging them to give him veritaserum but with so much overwhelming evidence they told him to sit down and accept judgment for his crime. Harry shouted and pleaded, tears running down his face unbidden, he was too overrun by the betrayal he felt to care that he was showing any weakness in front of these people. He fought against the two aurors that were dragging him out of the courtroom to his 'new home' trying to yell some sense into his former friends and mentors.

“Shut up you bastard, you killed my brother!” Ron shouted at him breaking Harry’s wand over his knees. Sparks emitted from the broken wood and fizzled out dying into nothingness. Harry felt another part of him die with his wand; he had owned that wand since he entered the wizarding world. Even though it was a twin to Voldemorts, it had gotten him through every scrape superbly, now it was no longer. Harry lifted his tear streaked face pleading with them to understand, to realize that he didn’t do this, it wasn’t him. He couldn’t believe that Ron, his first and best friend could ever do that to him. Ron knew what he went through every summer! He knew about his nightmares! How could he not understand? The hate that gleamed in his friends eyes told Harry enough.

“Harry how could you? I wish I had never met you, you foul some, evil cockroach! ” Hermione shot from across the room. A book flew at him and as it landed in front of his feet it burst into flames. His eyes fell on the familiar photo album that Hagrid had given him after his first year at Hogwarts. Smoke billowed up causing him to cough at the foul smell of burnt pages and the only memories he had of his parents and family. Photos curled in upon themselves dissolving to ash, he couldn’t tear his eyes away. His mother and father waived at him happily from the photograph unknowing that this was the last time he would see them. His knees gave out and he threw his head back in a primal scream of agony. Harry felt a coldness fill him and the world went black, nightmares began over and over repeating and warping into ever gruesome details.

It seemed that everyone in the court room had gone silent as the boy before them screamed in pain, as if his heart had just exploded. If they had known better, they would realize that they had just broken the boy who lived, the boy they had sworn they loved and would protect at all costs, their savior. The boy they now condemned and spit on as he was dragged out of the courtroom unconscious once again.

Harry remembered the scene of his trial not only in his nightmares but in his waking life as well. It tortured him over and over, every feeling of love then betrayal repeating itself in a never ending cycle. He didn’t know how long he had been in his new home as he called it, as time

really had no meaning here. Life was just a long drawn out torture session, nightmares of all who had died cursed him at night, and those that lived cursed him during the day. The pain numbing him, pulling him from life, he longed for death. Dementors were a non-entity now. He could hear the mournful screams of others when the Dementors were around but they didn't affect him anymore, he was forever drowning in his memories, he had no more happy memories for them to feed off. He couldn't distinguish between his dreams and the real world. A condemned man he was and he accepted it, thought he deserved it, he wished his death would come soon. The courts of the wizarding world must be debating it, why were they taking so long? Even being kissed by a Dementor would be a welcomed relief from the soul shredding he endured.

Curled in his 'bed' trying to steal warmth where there was none, he heard voices. At first he thought the wizarding world had finally decided to end his life and he welcomed it. Waiting anxiously for the sound of footsteps he was disappointed when none came. He listened harder, forcing his mind to push aside the visions so he could better hear the sounds of the dungeon, but after what he thought was several minutes no sound came and no-one opened his cell door. He cursed himself for the fool he was for even hoping for something like that, the pain of betrayal and longing instantly engulfed him, it was worse than it had been that first fateful day. However the voices came again and didn't leave, they became stronger and stronger, clearer within his mind, explaining, nurturing, caring, and giving. He welcomed the voices with open arms fully understanding that this was the last straw, he would now officially be considered insane, but the voices were comforting, how he longed for comfort. The voices became his life-line. Succumbing to them he took greedily from them, not really understanding who or what they were, they filled the darkness within him relieving him of the constant pain.

"It is time young one."

Darkness surrounded him and he couldn't see who was talking to him, he felt himself being lifted up, then the pain left and he was free. Free of the pain and of the visions, a bright light engulfed him, warming his soul. It was so bright he was afraid to open his eyes.



"You are safe Harry Potter. There is none here that will cause you pain." A gentle musical voice whispered.

"Who are you?" Harry asked without opening his eyes.

"We are who we are. We are here to assist you young one, as the world has been led astray from its path."

"Where am I and how are you going to assist me?" Surprised at the strength in his voice after not using it so long he continued, "How can I talk, why don't I feel..."

"All will be explained, have patience."

Harry's ire started to grow; this was exactly the type of conversation that got him into trouble before. No one told him anything that he needed to know, just expected him to blindly follow everyone else's council.

"Do not get angry Harry Potter, for we have a long journey and you require the little strength you now possess. Trust us for now."

"What journey? Where are we going? What...." Harry was prevented from saying anything else as he felt himself being pulled quickly through the air. Not quite the same feeling as a portkey, this was more like whipping down a slide, smooth and streamlined not swirling around making him sick. After what felt like a lifetime, Harry finally felt himself stop softly. 'Definitely not like a portkey' he thought remembering the jarring he experienced upon arriving from them.

"We are here, rest easy young one."

A plush bed appeared from nowhere and Harry was lifted onto it. Soft warm blankets surrounded him and his mind was at peace. Right now he didn't much care where he was, as long as it wasn't his cold hard cell in Azkaban. Relieved at finally being away from the terror and pain, he drifted off into a dreamless sleep before he could say a word.

"It is time to wake Harry."

That voice sounded familiar but his sleep fogged mind could not place it. All he wanted to do was fall back to the peaceful sleep he had been awakened from.

“Harry, wake up now. I am sure there are many questions you have and it is time to explain.”

“Wha....?” Harry yawned. Rolling onto his side he pushed himself up to a sitting position trying to rub the sleep from his eyes. He reached for his glasses but felt something being slipped onto his face. Instinctively he recoiled from the touch, but then realized it was only his glasses. Blinking a few times he was able to finally focus on the figures standing around his bed and was so shocked he felt faint.

“Mum! Dad! Sirius?” He gasped out and started to hyperventilate at the very alive people standing before him.

“It’s okay Harry, calm down and breath. Yes it’s us.” A beautiful red haired woman spoke as she sat down on the bed next to Harry and placed her arm around him. Harry looked at her askance not really sure what to believe. It could very well be another attempt by Voldemort to trick his mind. However, he didn’t believe Voldemort knew how to be comforting or loving or actually make someone feel it. He made up his mind not to worry about it. Sirius knelt down in front of Harry causing him to turn his attention to him.

“It’s real Harry.” Sirius said placing a hand on the bed.

“It’s good to see you Harry, but I would have liked to see you under other circumstances.” James sadly stated with his eyes downcast.

“Am I finally dead?” Harry whispered looking at each one of the people he knew to be dead.

“No Harry, this is the ethereal plane. The Fates have brought you here in order to save you and the rest of the world.”

“What’s the ethereal plane? And why would I want to save the world after all they did to me.” He stated hotly. Looking up again he saw the sad expressions on the faces of those he loved and knew loved him.

"You have been given a great burden Harry, not one easily discarded. We are here to help you." His mother stated as she ran her hand up and down his back in a soothing manner. Harry was pleasantly surprised by the gesture. He had never had someone willingly touch him like that and it felt extremely good and he leaned into it wanting more. His mother chuckled softly and then pulled him into a loving hug.

"Oh Harry, I have missed you! I have longed to hold you for so long!"

Recovering from his momentary shock he hugged his mother back fervently and was soon joined in the hug by his father and Sirius. Long withheld emotions broke over the damn he had built up and came flooding in. He didn't try to fight it, he was with people who loved and cared about him, not just the weapon, but him. He cried for what seemed like ages with his mother, father and godfather holding him trying to ease his discomfort.

"It will be all right son. You will see, just give it time."

Sirius, ever the one to try to relieve such serious situations was the first to pull back from the embrace. Wiping his eyes he looked upon his godson and smiled. "We have a lot to teach you Harry and I'm sure going to enjoy it."

Harry felt his mother and father pull from the embrace and looked up to see them trying to hold back their chuckles.

"What's going on?" Harry asked bewildered by this change.

"Well Harry, the Fates are none to happy with old moldy right now. They think he's cheated them out of their due too many times and have decided to collect. This is where you come in." His father tried to explain.

"Yeah, now their just pissed and are going to prepare you to go kick his arse."

“Language Sirius, I will not have you speaking in front of my child that way!” Lily scolded.

Harry looked from his godfather to Lily and busted out laughing.

“What’s so funny young man?”

“Well....um....” Harry tried to get his laughter under control seeing the stern gaze of his mother now directed at him. “Well you see, um....”

“Lily leave the boy alone. We have a lot of work to do and I’m sure he’ll be hearing worse once he meets everyone.”

Harry’s head perked up at this. “What do you mean ‘meet everyone’? Who else am I going to see? It’s not just you guys?”

Sirius and James started chuckling again even though Lily was now directing her hard stare at them again. “Oh for Merlins’ sake!”

“Did someone call me?”

Harry literally jumped as another figure appeared out of no where and walked towards them.

“No Merlin, Lily was just.....well since you are here maybe we should get all the introductions done then let Harry digest it all.”

So more people appeared out of nowhere and Harry was flabbergasted to say the least. All these ancient and great wizards were going to help him train. “Now Harry for a special surprise.” Merlin chuckled, as a bright light flashed.

“I would like to introduce you to the Fates.” Harry was speechless. His father tried to prod him but nothing happened. Sirius waved his hand in front of Harry’s eyes, still nothing. Sirius chuckled at the dumbstruck look on Harry’s face then became worried as Harry fainted.

When Harry woke up next he found himself in a grand bedroom. It reminded him of his dorm room in Gryffindor but looked like this was

all for him. He found he was laying in a king size four poster bed with red and gold hangings and silky cream colored sheets. It was luxurious. He had never felt so comfortable in his life. Deciding he was awake and not dreaming, did it really matter if he was, he cautiously looked over the side of the bed before stepping out. Hitting solid ground he breathed a sigh of relief, but jumped at the sound of a voice behind him.

"Thought you would fall out of the sky?" Came the slightly amused voice of his mother. She came fully into the room bearing a tray filled with all sorts of food.

"Come sit at the table and we will have lunch and discuss some more details you should know."

Harry obeyed without question. He was still getting used to the idea that he was able to converse with his dead parents, but who was he to argue. He approached the table that was set up in a corner of his room near a large window. As he sat his mother pulled the hangings aside so that sunlight streamed into the room lighting it up spectacularly. Now that he could see more he looked around and saw that the room was much larger than he originally thought. His bed sat in the middle of the room against the far wall. Plush red carpeting lined the floor and he found he enjoyed scrunching his toes into it. On the other side of the bed was a large ornate wooden dresser with a mirror. Various toiletries sat on top of it and he could only hope that the drawers were filled with clothing he could wear. Two doors adorned the far wall and he was curious as to what was behind them. Across from his bed was a large comfortable squishy couch in front of a large fireplace. Beside the fireplace was a bookshelf filled with books and other nick-nacks and on the other side a door that he imagined led to the rest of the house he was supposedly in. Beside the door in the corner of the room across from where he was sitting was a large oak desk with a leather chair behind it. The walls were done in a modest cream colored paint with a wooden border.

"Do you like your room Harry?" His mother interrupted his gazing.

"It's wonderful! I've never...." He gulped, not wanting to reveal any part of his life that might upset his mother.

She sat down next to him and lifted his chin so that their eyes met. "Harry, we know all about the kind of life that you have lived. That is one of the many reasons you are here now. Your Father and I were furious with Albus but there was nothing we could do. We are so sorry for what you have gone through, but never for one instance believe that we are ashamed of you. We could not love you any more than we already do and we are so proud of you Harry for the man you are becoming. You have lived through a tough life and have weathered it admirably."

Harry met his mother's loving gaze and fought back the tears threatening his eyes. "You know.....how.....I..."

"Never be ashamed of who you are Harry. We have watched you from the time we were taken away from you and we have seen it all. I am beyond angry at my sister for what she has done and allowed that boorish pig and piglet do to you. It is not a weakness Harry." She said as she saw the shame in his features. "You have ever strived to do your best believing that that would make them love you. I am sorry to say that the Dursley's held no love for you or even each other."

"What?...They always gave Dudley whatever he wanted. He was never locked in a cupboard or beaten or...."

"Yes that is true Harry, but true love is not being given everything your heart desires. No true love is much more complicated. I know for a fact that if any of the Dursley's were put into a life or death situation, they would not give up their own life for the other. That is not true love. They are currently being given the chance to find it."

"Are they....they....alive?" he asked fearing the answer either way.

"No Harry they are not, but they will not be allowed to enter this plane until they truly understand what they did in life and learn to truly love."

"Um, they.....are they..."

"Harry, don't be afraid to ask the questions running around in that head of yours. I know the Dursley's indirectly taught you to be self

reliant, but you need to learn to trust others. Everyone is not inherently good or bad. We are a mixture of both. Our emotions and choices are what makes us who we are. Never be ashamed of showing your emotions even when they sometimes seem to overwhelm you. You are only human Harry, and we all have instances like that. Sometimes it is a very good thing to cry or get angry and especially to love.”

“It’s so hard..” Harry choked out.

“I know son, but we are here to help you now.”

”What’s going to happen?”

“Well Harry, we are going to train you to use the powers that have been bestowed upon you.”

“What powers? I barely can keep up in classes and....”

“SSShh, let me explain, this may take a while, so why don’t we eat while we’re talking hmmm?”

“Okay....mum.” he said shyly.

“I like the sound of that! You know your first word was Paddy, we knew then that we were in for it.” She said chuckling.

“What do you mean?”

“Well, when you were born we couldn’t get Remus or Sirius to leave you alone. They were constantly competing for your attention, hell bent upon you saying their names before ‘mum’ or ‘dad’. Sirius won out and we knew then that no matter what we did he would be corrupting you for the rest of your life. It was funny at the time. Remus then kept trying to get you to play tricks on Sirius and James and there were quite a lot of good ones. Of course being a marauder James would not be shown up in front of his son by his best mates so he secretly taught you how to hold a wand and use it. When I found out it was a little late and Sirius was floating all over the house. We knew you were powerful then and tried to make sure your power was

controlled. James and I sought out the help of Albus to put a block on your powers until we were sure you could control them. I regret that we ever made that decision. Albus did not lift the block when he was suppose to." She sighed

"When was it supposed to be lifted?"

"Oh.." startled back from her reverie she continued, "It was to be lifted the day of your 11th birthday when you would be going to Hogwarts. There Albus was to assist in teaching you to control your powers, but failed us and you. I should have seen it coming, he always has been manipulative. Always wanting to control things in his own way, not realizing how much he was tampering. You see Albus Dumbledore has been around for quite along time and I believe his mind is failing him. He fails to remember people as individuals with individual dreams and feelings. His fight with Grindewald must have affected him more than we thought and then Voldemort's rise. In his own way he truly believes he is saving the world, but he doesn't realize the cost. Well, anyway...I'm getting off topic. I'm sure you understand what I'm talking about." She smiled wanly at him.

"Yeah, I understand now, just wish I saw it before all this happened."

"So where were we. Ah yes, well seeing as how you didn't have access to your full powers as well as other things that should have been turned over to you, Voldemort was able to rise to power again and spread evil throughout the world. Now we are at a turning point. Either Voldemort falls or evil reins the earth and it will be destroyed."

"What?" Harry spat choking on his bite of bangers.

"Yes Harry, you see there is much more at stake than anyone realizes. We, that is, those that dwell in the land of the dead, are privy to this information but those that are living have no idea. That's just how Fate works." She shrugged and took a couple bites.

"So I have no choice if the world is to survive? I have to go back and finish him?"



“Yes Harry, but that is not all. You see if Voldemort gains control, not only will the earth cease to exist, but so will the afterlife and anyone in it, for all realms of the earth will disappear. In a sense we are also saving Voldemort for he doesn’t realize what is at stake.”

“Bloody Hell!”

“Harry!”

“Sorry Mum, but that’s a little much to take in! How in...sorry...am I supposed to stop this?” Placing his fork back down on the table he slumped in his seat having lost his appetite. He ran his hands through his hair trying to grasp what he had just been told.

“It isn’t all bad Harry. That’s why you’re here.”

“You know, everyone keeps saying that! What am I suppose to do, there isn’t much time!”

“Well first thing Harry is that time here does not act in the same manner as the living world. For each month in the living world a year goes by here. From what we have gathered that gives us four years to train you up.”

“Wow!”

“Be careful son, don’t want to swallow any flies.” She chuckled.

“Um...why do I only have four years here? What’s going to happen?” he said. His brain was now functioning and he was curious as to what would be going on in four months that was so important that he had to get back.

“Well Harry, the Fates gave us a rare glimpse into the future. Voldemort plans to attack Azkaban and take you. We have to stop that before it happens.”

“Okkkkaaayyy. So when do we start and what am I going to be learning?”

“Finish eating Harry, you’re going to need your strength.” She watched her son out of the corner of her eye as he slowly began to eat again. Love swelled in her heart as she thought about him and how he continually overcame the trials that were thrown his way. Noticing how much he looked like James she stifled a chuckle at what the rest of his life would bring him. She desperately wanted him to fall in love and live a long happy life. Sighing she pushed those thoughts from her head and concentrated on what the next four years of their lives together would be like. She would finally get a chance to be with her son instead of watching from a distance and swore it anything she would instill some confidence in the young man. He had a lot to offer the world and some lucky lady and could only hope that they would realize it.

Harry realizing he would get nothing more out of his mother began eating again wondering what would happen next. After lunch Lily led Harry outside where he was told he was going to begin training. He was glad that no one had told him what to expect, for if he had known he was sure he would’ve turned around and never looked back. At least that’s what he would have tried to do.

His days were packed with training in physical fitness, potions, transfiguration, charms, defense, ancient magic long lost to the wizarding world, animagus training, metamorphmagus training, physical combat, sword fighting, magical creatures, occlumency, legilimency, wandless/wordless magic, strategy, politics and muggle studies. Lily would not let her son disregard the advantages of modern technology and science. During his training his soul was allowed to live life in the ethereal plain, while his physical body remained at Azkaban. The Fates had taken care to mask Harry’s body so that it could survive without it’s soul. Acting very much like a Dementor kissed individual, the physical Harry continued on in the way that all the guards at the prison had come to expect. No one would be able to tell that Harry was being trained and receiving what he really needed.

Although most of the individuals Harry was in contact with in the ethereal plane were adults, he found that he was the happiest he had ever been. James and Sirius took it upon themselves to make sure he carried on the legacy of the marauders and taught him everything

they knew about pranking. Harry believed when he returned he could easily rival the Weasley twins. He found he had quite the creative and eerily scary mind when it came to planning pranks.

Every meal was spent with his family and at night he was able to sit and relax with them discussing whatever came to mind. In time Harry realized that he was healing, and was able to open up with his parents and Sirius about his life. They helped him see that he was not at fault for the deaths that Voldemort caused. Each and every person was responsible for their own choices and actions. He also realized that with every choice there were resulting actions that would have to be dealt with, whether good or bad. He was only responsible for the ramifications of his own actions and as he reviewed his life came to understand this. The guilt he had felt for the deaths of others at the hands of Tom Riddle was gone to be replaced by righteous anger. He knew he wasn't infallible but he now had more resources and knowledge to make decisions.

Lying by the lake near his home on the ethereal plane he was lost in thought when Sirius snuck up on him and banished him into the water.

"You're going to pay for that Padfoot!" he shouted upon surfacing. His godfather was oblivious rolling in the grass holding his stomach laughing. As Harry swam to the shore and exited his mind was working evilly. Sirius missed the look in Harry's eyes and continued to laugh at the drenched form walking towards him.

Harry stalked over to his godfather and levitated him into the air, then made him glow bright neon pink. Sirius struggled to escape the magic that bound him before anyone could see, but then a loud squawking erupted through the valley as birds flocked towards him. His arms were forced to stick straight out to his sides and the birds landed on them making him into a living pink flashing scarecrow. The sound of the birds attracted the attention of everyone in the house. Again he tried in vain to break free of the magic holding him. The sounds of laughter filled the lawn and he sighed. He was stuck and he knew defeat.

"Alright Harry, you won. Now let me down."

"I don't think so Paddy. A little lesson in humility may do you a bit o' good." Harry said as he walked off towards the house.

Sirius moaned as the more people were drawn to the site and the sound of laughing increased tenfold. Although he admitted defeat, that didn't mean that payback wasn't around the corner. He had taught his godson well, but there were still a few things that Harry had yet to learn. With that thought in mind he chuckled to himself and appreciated the fine spell work Harry had accomplished.

James put his arm around his sons' shoulders proudly. "Nice work son. How long are you going to keep him there?"

"Oh, I don't know, maybe until dinner. You think that's long enough?" he said quirked an eyebrow up as he looked back to Sirius.

"Probably not, but you know he'll retaliate. Pride and all that, can't have the younger generation of marauders outdoing him you know."

"Yeah, yeah."

"Harry, we have to talk later tonight. I really think Sirius should be a part of it." Lily stated trying to control her laughter.

"What do we have to talk about?"

"Well Harry it's almost time for you to go back and we need to discuss what's going to happen."

"Oh" was all he said, starting to become depressed at leaving his home.

"I know what you're thinking Harry. It won't be bad in the long run." James said hugging Harry to him.

"Well time to break this up! Harry you have sword fighting, let's get going!" Godric Gryffindor stated cheerily patting Harry on the back. He had grown to love sword fighting with the young man. He had become a master at it, almost a natural and looked forward to every

sparring match. "I can't wait to see the shock on everyone's faces when they see how good you are my boy!"

"That's an understatement if I ever heard one Godric. I think my Harry here will shock them with whatever he does!"

"You're right about that James!"

"Come on let's get going." Harry said shying away from the praise. 'That's one thing I'll never get use to.' He thought.

After dinner that night James, Lily, Harry and finally Sirius sat down in front of the fireplace in the sitting room to talk. Harry wasn't looking forward to this but his mood was lightened by the disgruntled look on Sirius' face.

"You still mad at me Padfoot?" he asked innocently, trying to put on his best puppy dog eye look.

"Harry, don't think that look will get you anywhere, I know you too well. I'm not mad at you, just trying to figure out how to get you back."

"No fair, I was retaliating for dumping me in the lake." He spoke up indignantly.

"Yeah, but that was payback for charming the whole house to hear my singing in the shower."

"But that was..."

"Enough boys, your prank war will have to wait, we have some serious issues to discuss."

"Oh I didn't realize this conversation was to be about me."

"Sirius, that's old!"

"You always thought it was funny before Prongs."

"I said enough! Now Harry we need to discuss what will happen when you return. The Fates have kept your body from falling completely apart but it will be difficult for you when you return."

"Yeah, I remember talking about that. Since this is really only my soul and mind that is on the ethereal plane my body won't have kept up with my physical developments."

"Right son, now when you return to your body your metamorphmagus skills will come in handy at first. You need to escape and take care of only immediate problems. I know that Dumbledore has not told you about our will or Sirius' for that matter, and there are a few things along those lines that you will have to find out by yourself. We cannot directly interfere with the living world and cannot tell you what's been going on."

"Yeah I know, you've said that before. All you can help me with is in training me because the Fates allowed it." He said in rote memory of what they had told him before.

"I know this is hard for you son, but remember what we have taught you."

"I will mum."

"Also remember that we will always be with you son. I want you to have a happy life when this is all done. I want to see grandchildren inhabiting the world!"

"Dad, don't you think that's a little ways off? I mean I don't even have a girlfriend! Let alone been kissed." He mumbled as an afterthought.

"Didn't I hear something about that Chang girl?"

"Shut it Padfoot." Harry warned.

"Harry, don't be embarrassed! You'll have plenty of time to find a girl that loves you and sees in you what we all see. In fact I think there is already someone out there ready to catch your eye."

“Mum!”

“If I’m not mistaken, Prongs didn’t you say that all Potters go for redheads?” Sirius said wriggling his eyebrows suggestively.

James laughed at Harry’s indignation.

“I don’t even know any red haired girls. In fact the only red heads I know are the Weasleys, and even if I did swing that way they would be the last ones on earth I would ever.....”

“Harry, I don’t think you’re in the right frame of mind.” Lily chuckled at the shocked indignant look on Harry’s face, but then sobered up. “Harry you know you will have to face them eventually. In time I hope you will be able to forgive them. Remember our talk about the Dursley’s?”

Harry’s head shot up at that and then nodded reluctantly. “Yeah, yeah. I know I will have to deal with them. I can understand some of it but not all of it. I still believe it’s going to be harder to see them face to face.”

“It will be son. I know that when and if Peter ever makes it up here, it will be hard on all of us but we have to move on. We can’t let them or what they have done rule our lives. Now what about this red head?”

Harry sighed. It didn’t seem as if he was going to get them off this subject. “I told you I don’t know any red headed girls, the only ones I know are the Weasleys and Mrs. Weasley is just way too old for me.” He smiled at their shocked expressions.

“Can’t you think of anyone else? I think if you let that train of thought on the Weasley’s continue...”

“I like girls Sirius!”

“Huh?”

“Son, you’ve got it all wrong!” James started laughing again. Lily and Sirius soon joined in.

“What are you all laughing at!”

“Sometimes you amaze me Harry! Can you not see it?”

“Mum, this is getting bloody annoying! Out with it!”

“No...no...I think this is one of those things you have to find out on your own. Besides we need to get back to the topic at hand.”

“Right! Enough about my love life. I have to get a life first.”

“Well Harry, keep working on your animagus forms and they should help you out.”

“No I think Harry needs to get out of that place faster than that Padfoot.”

“I agree Harry; you’ll have to go through the wards of Azkaban immediately. Your body should be able to handle that. You’ll have to really focus your mind to account for your lack of physical strength, but you should be good for a couple of days living off your magic. Don’t forget to find a safe place to hide out for several days while your body adjusts to everything. It’s going to be quite painful while that happens, and you won’t be able to take anything to dull the pain.”

“I know. I’m just glad that my body will adjust to what I’ve become accustomed to here instead of having to start from scratch again.”

“Right, now do you have a disguise selected until you clear your name?”

“Yes dad. I’m going to use the name James Roper and use my metamorphmagus skills to alter my eye and hair color and hide the scar.”

“That should be enough.” Sirius thought out loud. “You’ve come up with a cover story?”

“Well not yet, but I’m sure something will hit me.”



"See that you come up with something quickly Harry. I don't want you in any more danger than you have to be."

"It's going to be hard to avoid it mum."

"I know Harry, but humor me?"

Harry smiled at her in answer.

"Go easy on Remus Harry, until you hear his story?" his dad pleaded.

"I will, but I won't promise anything."

"That's all I can ask son."

"Remember that you are going to have to interact with the Weasley's at some point. I know we've talked about this but how are you really with it?" Sirius asked quietly.

"Well that's another issue isn't it? I know we've talked about it, and I know I can't hate them forever, but I'm just going to have to deal with it as I go. And before you ask about Dumbledore, I really have no idea. To me he's done worse than the Weasley's have."

"Remember love forgives all things Harry. It is your greatest gift." Lily offered.

"Yes mum."

"Okay, I think we've covered everything. Let's go to bed, shall we, we have a long day tomorrow as we will be celebrating your birthday early this year." James clapped his hands together in anticipation and stood up.

"Kind of a birthday, coming of age and going away party all in one." Sirius said imitating James gestures. Harry hung his head.

"Don't be sad Harry. We have had four wonderful years together that under normal circumstances we would have never had. You need to

remember the good times until you join us again, and that better not be for a very long time Harry James Potter.” Lily finished in a mock scolding tone.

“I believe Merlin has something special for you!” Sirius interrupted.

“Do I even want to know? He’s worse than you and dad combined!”

“I believe you’ll like this Harry!” James said.

“Okay okay, let’s just go up then.”

## Chapter 2—Back to Life

Before he wanted it to, the day arrived to return to the realm of the living so he could complete his task. Voicing his feelings to the Fates and his true family they understood how he felt but reminded him that someday they would be together again. Harry asked the Fates how it would turn out, but they wouldn't let him see the Tapestry of Life and only hinted that in time, after he fulfilled his life that he would be reunited with them. He thanked them all for all they had done for him and had revealed to him. In the case of Merlin, he was especially thankful and couldn't wait to be able to use his gift. Merlin was very explicit that Harry not use the gift until he was ready and that he would know when that was. Even though this confused Harry he was still thankful for it. Those that were actually ancestors of his didn't want to spoil the surprise waiting for him and honored James, Lily's and Sirius's wishes not to divulge the secret which made Harry slightly suspicious and angry but he shrugged it off knowing that he would find out soon enough. The four years he had spent with them all helped him immeasurably and didn't care that he didn't get any material gifts, although he was assured that he would not be lacking anything for the rest of his life.

His going away/Birthday/Coming of age party was the best party he had ever had, and he was sad that it was all coming to an end. He really didn't understand the coming of age part but once again shrugged it off knowing the quirky characters he had lived with.

So it was with great reluctance that Harry said his goodbyes in order to get out of Azkaban before Voldemort's planned attack. Crying softly he hugged everyone and turning quickly to leave not looking back, he had a job to do, and then he could be with them all again. He didn't know when that would be, but he had learned that they would always be with him.

It was strange returning to his emaciated body. He felt weak but the magic in his soul and mind kept him from being immobilized. Picking himself up off the cold hard floor of his cell he disengaged the charms that were cast by the Fates. He stretched in his real body feeling every crack and pop it made from so much disuse. He couldn't wait to come into his true form again, and decided to get going. The fact that

Voldemort had a plan to attack Azkaban and finally kill Harry Potter in a few days prompted him to act. This was going to be a turning tide in the future of the world. One in which Harry knew he would succeed eventually. It would be hard going but he was confident now.

He would exact revenge on Voldemort and then a little more from those who betrayed them. He would accomplish the task the Fates set him if not a little more. Hoping that he would have a life beyond all this he reminded himself of the numerous talks he had had in the other plane. Remus was the only one that he was not quite sure of when it came to trial. He wasn't at his trial and he needed to hear the story from the remaining marauders' own mouth before he made any judgment. However, everyone else was at the trial with their hateful glares and attitude, making sure that Harry got what he deserved at least in their minds. The Weasley's, all of them who had loved him and swore he was like a son, and brother, easily turned upon the death of Percy. Even though Percy was still not reconciled with the family, they believed Harry capable of murder and worse. They spouted all the nasty rumors that had followed Harry in previous years as being the truth and that somehow Harry had manipulated them, they were too afraid of Harry at the time to say anything against him. Although it all sounded ludicrous they believed it. Taking a deep cleansing breath he pushed away the anger, it would not do him any good at the moment. It was going to be difficult though.

Harry knew Ron was jealous of him but he could never figure out why. He would have gladly given up everything he had to be part of a loving family like Ron had, but it wasn't enough. Didn't he see past all the fame and glory bullshit to what his life had actually been like? Granted, he had never told anyone about the abuse he had received in the care of the Dursley's, but Ron had seen enough hadn't he? He, Fred and George were the ones that had to break him out of his house in his second year. Weren't the bars on his windows an indication?

Ginny, was that who they were talking about? She did have red hair, but he thought she was over him. Besides, at the trial she just glared daggers at him, she wouldn't come anywhere near him, she wouldn't even testify, just constantly glared at him from her seat next to Mrs. Weasley in the courtroom. He'd tried to get her to believe that he

couldn't do what they accused him of. Wasn't the fact that he had saved her and her father in the past proof?

Mrs. Weasley hurt worse than all of them, her scathing comments about trusting him and taking him under her wing only to be paid back by killing her beloved son, then going on about how he was such a disgrace to the name of Potter and how disappointed his parents would be, rolling over in their graves. Harry knew the truth of it all now, but back then, he felt his blood flow like glass tearing his insides apart at every sharp comment and cold stare. He was devastated when Hermione burned his photo album.

STOP! He shouted at himself. "No more of that, you don't have everyone to help you now. You know the truth and must set it right! When it's done I can rest."

Wiping the wetness away from his face, shocked to learn he had been crying, he took one last look around his cell, his 'home' for the last year. With a flick of his wrist he set it all to flames and disappeared without a sound.

No one at Azkaban even realized he had left; the flames had smoldered and finally extinguished leaving only ashes and a blackened leg of a wooden but damp stool. The Dementors didn't even notice that there was one less soul to feed on, and the wards sounded no alarms. No one knew that Harry Potter the Boy-That-Lived was now free and roaming amongst them.

Harry appeared in Knockturn Alley and quickly adjusted the conjured glasses on his face, for his originals had been broken and no one thought he would need them in Azkaban. Getting his bearings wandlessly configured his decrepit prisoner garb into more suitable clothing. At least the black transfigured cloak wasn't going to give him away like the black and white pajamas he had had to wear. He hitched the transfigured cloak up around him for warmth and changed his hair brown and his eyes blue and concealed his scar. He contemplated using a warming charm but didn't want to risk using too much magic. He was literally keeping his body alive with it for now and didn't know how much it would affect him. Looking around he noticed that there weren't too many people out but he didn't care,

they wouldn't recognize him anyway. Standing tall he started walking towards Diagon Alley, there was a lot he needed to do, but first he had to take care of a little financial problem.

Aware of everything around him, he breathed a sigh of relief to know that his metamorphmagus abilities were working splendidly, no one recognized him or stared at him. Nothing was out of the ordinary here in Diagon Alley; at least that's what the general populous felt. Pressing on to Gringotts he stopped cold when he saw the shop located across the street from it. Weasley Wizarding Wheezes, the sign prominently announced in brilliant constantly changing colors. Harry glared darkly into the window for a moment then quickly shook himself back to his priorities. The Weasley's could wait; there were more important things he needed to accomplish so his revenge could wait.

He briefly thought of how similar his situation was to his godfathers, but he already knew that Sirius's name was cleared, it had happened right before his trial. 'How ironic that one man is cleared right before another innocent one is condemned, you would think they would learn, or at least maybe have second thoughts,' the only difference being that he would see his name cleared before he died, unlike his godfather. NO!

Harry straightened his shoulders and stiffly walked into Gringotts, he didn't know what to expect here but he knew he needed money to put his plans in action. Hoping all he had to do was present his chosen financial goblin with proof of his key to his vault he strode purposefully into the bank and up to a free goblin. Running a hand through his blond hair he stated his request to speak with Griphook, knowing he was in charge of his finances and had actually met him before. At least he wasn't as much of an unknown as the other goblins could be. After a few minutes the goblin returned and led Harry to a private office and after ushering him in, he left. Waiting only a few seconds, Harry turned as he heard Griphook enter.

"May I help you sir?" he asked in a suspicious and unwelcoming voice.

"I wish to access my vault, and I do not want to take up much of your time Griphook."

"And how do you know my name sir?" he asked climbing up into the seat behind the desk and rummaging through some drawers.

"You are of course my personal financial manager Griphook. That is unless you no longer wish to be?" Harry asked gruffly, he was wasting time and needed to move on, the authorities would probably be after him soon and he needed to get someplace safe before the pain of the transformation overwhelmed him. "Look Griphook, take a drop of my blood and let me in my damn vault alright? I can't waste time, and I'm sure you will probably understand why in a few minutes. You will also understand that your secrecy will be much appreciated and handsomely rewarded after we're done here."

"Ah, I see" the little goblin stated with a gleam dawning in his eyes. "Your trust vault is no longer accessible to you Mr. Potter."

"What! What do you mean? Why can't I access my vault? I thought everything was safe in Gringotts?" Harry growled leaning over the desk of the goblin.

"Please let me continue sir. You are personally protected while in this bank as are the assets that are protected by ancient magic uncontrollable by the ministry."

"Then how can I not access my vault?" Harry questioned thoroughly confused.

"Please take a seat Mr. Potter and I will try to explain." Griphook stopped after saying this and waited for Harry to get himself under control and sit down.

Running a frustrated hand through his hair, he sighed deeply and slumped down into the chair Griphook indicated. "Please continue, I'm sorry but I'm sure you can understand my predicament and the frustration of finding out I have no money when I thought it was all protected."

“On the contrary Mr. Potter, you do have money, quite a lot of it as well as other interests.”

Harry closed his eyes and felt a headache coming on. Why couldn't the goblins just say everything outright instead of talking in riddles?

Griphook noticed that Harry was at about the end of the line and decided now was a good time explain everything.

“When your trust fund was set up by your parents they unfortunately and unwittingly signed control of your trust vault over to one Albus Dumbledore until you reached your majority. Yes,” Griphook stated holding up his hand so that Harry would not interrupt, “I realize now that this was never revealed to you..” he continued with obvious disagreement, “When you were incarcerated Dumbledore turned over control of your trust vault, with the approval of the ministry, to Arthur and Molly Weasley in reparation of your crimes against them.”

“Now you have got to be kidding!” Harry exclaimed, furious at the machinations of his once esteemed professor and the Ministry. He immediately thought of Ron and how he would be happy now that he had money, his money, to do with whatever he pleased. Probably thinking it payback for Harry supposedly betraying them all. “How can they do that! That was my parent's money!”

“Yes Mr. Potter, but there is one aspect that they were not able to control, although they tried.” Griphook gave Harry an intent stare with a gleam in his eyes.

“And that would be?”

“Mr. Potter you are one of the richest wizards in Britain. You happen to be the sole heir of several vaults, the least of which contains 10 times the amount in the trust vault.” Griphook chuckled at the dumbfounded look on the young mans face.

“Yes indeed, you are the sole heir of the Potter, Black and Evans vaults and are therefore the only one that can enter the vaults of those families. These vaults were created long before the ministry existed and are protected by ancient magic so therefore they do not



fall under the control of the ministry, only the rightful heir is allowed entrance. The trust vault set up for you by your parents was only a measure to provide for you before your 17th birthday, and so that your main funds were not subject to anyone else's control. The trust was set up to maintain 500,000 galleons. Each year on your birthday, money is transferred from the Potter family vault to the trust fund to ensure the total amount in the trust was met. Although you personally have made no significant withdrawals in recent years, I feel it my duty to inform you that in the past significant withdrawals were made in your name. Recently the trust vault has been almost emptied."

"How can anyone use that much money in one year?" Harry almost whispered surprised at the news. "That means the Weasleys have been using all my money?"

"Yes Mr. Potter it does. In one weeks time the trust vault will again be filled to meet the stipulations of the trust."

"So they'll keep getting money from my family for the rest of their lives?" Harry's shoulders stiffened at the injustice of it all. How could he let people that would do this to him back into his life? The people he once thought of as family were no better than the Dursley's. Given the resources they would go all out. He cringed inwardly knowing they were doing this in their own attempt to get back at him for killing Percy, they were trying to hurt him and succeeding quite nicely. He had been working on trying to forgive these people but now? Although he didn't care much about the money, he still needed it. But if what Griphook said was true he had more than enough to get by, but it was their actions that spoke volumes. They never cared about money before but now that they had it and knew it was coming from him they were making sure that there would be nothing left. Not that with several lifetime sentences he would supposedly ever need it but they would flaunt it in front of everyone, in front of him. This hurt almost as much as their betrayal. Fighting for breath and control of his thoughts he vowed somehow to put an end to all this.

Griphook watched silently as a myriad of emotions twisted Harry's face, pain, despair, surprise, anger, and finally a fierce determination set on his face. The man's eyes nearly glowed with it and Griphook

was momentarily taken back by the fearsome sight. This was definitely not a wizard to cross.

“Yes Mr. Potter unless....” The goblin stated tapping his long boney fingers in succession on the desk with a mischievous gleam in his eyes.

Harry saw this and was surprised by such a show of emotion from the usually stoic expressions that darned goblins faces. He also got the feeling that Griphook wanted to help him. “Please go on Griphook. I definitely need advice and would be honored if you’d provide me with it.”

“Well the sole controlling heir from the parent account can dissolve the deposits to the trust, in effect closing the trust. All monies remaining in that vault would revert to the family vault.”

“You just said that I was the sole heir, so what do I need to sign in order to do this?”

“First off Mr. Potter, yes, you are the sole heir but you are not the controlling heir as you have not yet reached your majority yet.”

“So how do we remedy this? I don’t want them to get another Knut from me.”

“In accordance with your Godfathers will, the late Mr. Sirius Black, a certain aspect was overlooked by the executer of said will.”

“Let me guess...Albus Dumbledore.” It was not a question, and Harry felt a knot develop in his stomach.

“Correct. Your godfather wished for you to be emancipated immediately upon his death, but Mr. Dumbledore failed to follow through on this wish. For what reasons I do not know, but I have the papers here for you to sign if this is what you wish.”

“Emancipated? What exactly does that mean?”

“It means Mr. Potter that you would be considered an adult, both in the wizarding world and muggle world with all rights and privileges by law. Even though you would have that in a week’s time, this would allow you immediate access and prevent the trust from refilling itself. It would also prevent anyone trying to control the issue of the trust or any other accounts.”

“You mean I’d be legally able to perform magic and be in control of my vaults?”

“That and much more....you would have no legal guardian and would be free to make all decisions regarding your life. You will also be subject and held accountable to all laws governing the wizarding world. Be warned however that as soon as you sign these papers, your presence here will be known by the ministry.”

“Ok, but I thought you said I was safe as long as I’m in Gringotts.”

“You are Mr. Potter, but I am referring to once you step foot out of this building.”

“Oh right. I believe I can handle that. So what do I have to sign?”

Griphook rummaged through a pile on his desk and produced a two page document showing Harry where his signature was needed. Looking at the documents he noticed that Sirius had already signed the papers as his legal guardian. ‘Thank you Sirius’ Harry thought and quickly signed his name.

“Good. Now a copy will be magically filed here at Gringotts, one at the ministry, and this copy is for you. Your other IDs and papers will be ready for you by the time we complete the rest of your visit. I believe we will also have a solution to the minor problem of the ministry waiting for you when you leave. Now that you are legally of age there is one more thing we need to accomplish before you come into control of your vaults. If you would please wait here for a moment?”

Harry nodded and watched as Griphook got down from his chair and moved across the room to a bare wall. He reached out with one of his

claw like fingers and ran it slowly down the wall. Harry reached out with his senses and felt a strange magical aura and knew everything was not as it seemed. A warm red light started to encapsulate the area; it grew and grew until it encompassed the entire wall, shimmered then revealed an entryway to another room.

“Wow,” was all Harry could say when the wall disappeared. Beyond was another larger room where several goblins were working at various tables.

“Lambin! Please bring me the box for Mr. Harry James Potter.” Lambin looked into the room to where Harry sat with bright awe filled eyes, nodded quickly and scurried off out of sight. Within a few minutes he was back with a small ornate wooden box which he handed to Griphook.

Griphook took the box wordlessly and turned to walk back into his office. Harry, totally at a loss as to what was going on, watched carefully as the goblin made his way back to his desk and placed the box upon it before returning to his seat. He didn't notice the entryway shimmer and once again turn back into a solid wall.

Griphook magically unlocked the box and opened the lid to reveal a deep blue velvet lined interior with three vials, 3 gold rings, several keys, a small metal container and a dragon hide wallet. His curiosity at the contents caused Harry to sit forward on his chair leaning closer to the desk to see better.

“Give me your wand hand,” he said grasping Harry's right hand facing it palm up. The goblin then proceeded to take one of his sharp talon-like nails and rake a cut across Harry's palm causing blood to pool into his palm and roll off the side. Harry winced with pain at the cut but as soon as the goblin had finished, the cut healed and Griphook had a small thimble of Harry's blood which he set down carefully on the desk. He then took one of the vials from the box and poured a drop of blood from the thimble into it. He repeated the same with the second and third vial.

Harry watched mesmerized by the procedure. Griphook then took one of the vials and tipped it to place a drop of the liquid within upon

each of the items within the box, then took the second and third vial and did the same thing. Setting all the vials back within the case he sat back and waited.

A few seconds later the items in the box glowed brightly then quickly returned to normal. Griphook smiled but Harry was still speechless.

“Now Mr. Potter, please place these rings on your hands, wherever you feel most comfortable.”

Harry reached out to grab one of the rings and upon closer inspection found that it had a family crest engraved on both sides and a dark emerald that sat atop it. He placed it on his left ring finger and felt a tingle of warmth shoot through his hand and up his arm until it encompassed his entire body. He closed his eyes momentarily reveling in the feeling, but upon a slight cough from Griphook he opened his eyes and looked back down at his hand. The ring fit perfectly. He picked up the other rings and placed one with a ruby on the ring finger of his right hand and the other, with a diamond, on his right index finger. All the rings seemed to fill him with something magical and they all magically adjusted to fit his fingers perfectly.

“Those are the family rings of each of your families Mr. Potter. They are traditionally passed down from father to son, but in your case the ritual of blood had to be used. The rings will identify you as the rightful heir of these families. They are magically protected so they will never wear or break and will never leave your fingers except upon your death, in which case they will return to this box unless you have already passed them on to your heir. Your rings will allow you and anyone you wish willingly to enter your vaults. No one else, even goblins, will be able to enter if you do not wish it. The Potter family ring also acts as a special portkey to and from the Potter Family vault. There has only ever been one other time that this courtesy was extended to a wizard, a very rare honor indeed.”

“Thankyou, but...”

“While the portkey will allow you access to your vault, you will not be able to enter any other area of Gringotts from your vault. The ring will also return you to the Potter family home if you wish it, or wherever

you wish to go. Here are the instructions on how to use the portkey function.” He said handing over a roll of parchment. “Keep this document safe Mr. Potter as it is the only one in existence. Only one with the Potter blood will be able to read it. Now these keys are intended for others that you wish to have access to the vaults and will be tuned in to them specifically when you decide. There are also several keys to properties that were owned by all three families, they too act as portkeys to each location and will allow you entrance.”

“What properties are there?” Harry asked now scrutinizing the goblin.

“There is a satchel here that I will give you upon the completion of our business for you to look through. All deeds and stock certificates are contained within for your review. They are copies of the originals which are stored within your vaults. I’d advise you to schedule time to review these as soon as possible, as there are a fairly large amount of documents to look through. Any questions you may have we can discuss at a later date.”

Harry nodded. “What are those?” Harry questioned indicating the metal box and wallet.

“This metal box works in the wizarding world as a money box. Each of your family crests has been inlaid on the cover of the box, which corresponds to each of your family vaults. You simply state the amount of galleons you need, place your thumb on the appropriate family crest you wish to withdraw from and it will appear in the box. The box will also shrink down to fit into your wallet so there is less to carry. The wallet acts the same for the muggle world, but you will also have to state which currency you need your galleons converted to. Since yours is a special account Mr. Potter you have a slightly better exchange rate than normal. The box will also shrink down when not in use to fit inside your wallet. Now open your wallet Mr. Potter.” Griphook said as he handed the black dragon hide wallet over.

Harry took it and felt the smooth texture of the dragon hide. Turning it over he found his three family crests embroidered into the front of the wallet and was amazed at the beauty and quality of it.

“Inside you will find your muggle ID, Drivers License, Muggle Birth Certificate a muggle credit card, and your emancipation records. Yes?”

“There all here! This is amazing, but I don’t even know how to drive!”

“It is all precautionary. You may learn how now if you want, you may also test for your apparition license at the ministry and place that in your wallet upon successful completion now that you are legally an adult.”

“I don’t think that will be happening anytime soon, but thanks.”

Griphook chuckled at the thought of Mr. Potter showing up in the ministry but got himself under control quickly. “I do believe you are correct Mr. Potter. At any rate, I advise you to keep all of your important documents in the wallet as it is charmed with anti-theft, Indestructible, notice-me-not, feather light, and internal expandable charms. The wallet on the outside will never change size but you will be able to store quite a bit inside of it. Just like the money box, it also is charmed with the special ability to return immediately to our vault should you loose them. I will be notified upon this happening and will in turn notify you. Do you have any questions sir?”

Harry had to shake his head to clear the overwhelming information that swarmed his mind. “Uh....well....yes actually.....you stated before that Dumbledore was controlling my trust fund and signed it over to the Weasleys.” Griphook nodded in acknowledgement of the fact. “You also stated that there were significant withdrawals in the past in my name. I wish to know who made these withdrawals, how much and where it all went.”

Harry watched as the gleam in the goblins eyes became brighter and immediately knew that Griphook was hoping he would ask this question. A feral grin split the goblins face and he leaned forward onto his desk leaning on his elbows. “Ah yes Mr. Potter that is one of the other topics that I should inform you of. Right after the unfortunate incident of your parent’s death, Mr. Dumbledore made significant withdrawals for 5 years from your trust vault.”

Harry's face turned into a scowl and he fought desperately to control the rage that was consuming him at the thought of his former headmaster steeling from him when he was but a child. He could have used that money! Harry knew none of it went to the Dursley's or himself. He could have at least been able to buy clothes or food! "How much and what did he do with it?" Harry ground out clenching his fists.

"He withdrew the entire balance each year and invested the monies in various stock holdings which have accrued a great amount of capital over the years. The monies were made in your name, Mr. Dumbledore's name and the name of "the Order of the Phoenix." There is a vault here that contains all of this, but you do not have control of it. Due to your monies being involved though you are a ½ owner of all the monies contained within the vault and any stockholdings as well. I can manage these for you if you wish or if you wish to liquidate them I can take care of that as well?"

"LIQUIDATE IT ALL!" Harry snarled. "I want nothing to do with that malicious manipulating bastard Dumbledore or his farce of an order. Protectors of the light my ass! Actually, transfer all of the stocks to my vaults, but take my name off of anything to do with those pretenders!" Harry was now pacing back and forth in the small office, anger growing every second. 'How dare he! "Now that I'm controlling heir I also want the trust fund dissolved!"

"As you wish sir, I just need you to sign these papers then we will be done."

Harry quickly signed where Griphook indicated and turned to leave. "One more thing Griphook, you won't tell anyone that I have visited here?"

"No sir, we goblins here at Gringotts do not fall under Ministry jurisdiction, although it causes strife from time to time we do not worry about the laws that the Ministry inflicts on the world. We have our Goblin Council that keeps our laws and interacts with the Ministry when needed, but I feel no obligation or desire to see anymore injustice inflicted upon you sir. I feel obliged to remind you however



that the ministry most likely is aware that you were here today due to the emancipation records.”

Harry froze. “Right! Wait....what are you talking about Griphook, are you saying that you believe I didn’t commit the crimes of which I’m accused?”

“Why yes, exactly that, in fact the whole of the Goblin world knows you are innocent.”

Harry’s heart soared at this news, could they possibly have some evidence that may help clear his name? “Do you know of any evidence that would clear my name, I would pay handsomely for it if you did.”

Griphook lowered his voice and leaned over the desk and whispered, Harry had to lean over just to hear him it was so low. “There is evidence sir, but it is locked away at the ministry in the Ministers private safe. He originally kept it in his vault here at Gringotts until one of our number found it while conducting an inventory for the owner, and brought it to the council members. They were enraged and wanted to confiscate the documents to turn over to an investigating authority in the Ministry when Minister Fudge found out and removed the documents.”

“Do you have any idea what they say, what they are?”

“I am told that there are testimonies of one Lucious and Draco Malfoy under the influence of Veritaserum. That is all I know, I believe there are some other testimonies and documents but I do not know who or what they are.”

Remembering that it was getting late and he couldn’t waste any time Harry shrunk the scrolls and money box and placed them along with the keys into his wallet. Placing the wallet into an inner pocket of his robe he stood up quickly and extended his hand to Griphook. They shook in a friendly manner and Harry thanked him genuinely for the added information.

“Griphook, I do not know what you are paid as my financial advisor, but whatever it is please add an additional 5 to it.”

“Thank you sir, I am glad to be of assistance and hope we have a long advantageous future together.”

Harry nodded in reply then activated the Potter Family Vault portkey on his ring. A second later he appeared in a vast cavern that was illuminated by torches spread evenly throughout the chamber. The light flickered and bounced off the contents of the room revealing mounds of gold galleons, precious metals, jewels, weapons and various cabinets and chests. He was amazed at the contents of this vault but knew he couldn't remain much longer. If this was any thing like what his other vaults contained, he'd be set for life. Reminding himself to get moving he set off to quickly take stock of this vault, the others would have to wait for another day.

His body started to ache indicating the transformation setting in, so he immediately set to work gathering what he would need for now. After an hour he had filled the multi-chambered trunk he had found with objects of varying use. He then shrunk the trunk to the size of a deck of cards and stuck it into an inside protected pocket of the black leather trench coat he now wore, which according to the vault directory had once belonged to his father, along with other items of clothing he found in his vault. He also transferred his other items from his old transfigured robe to his trench coat. When he threw the old robe onto the ground it transfigured back into the old ratty prison garb and he was again reminded of his past. “Incendio!” Harry whispered with his palm stretched towards the old clothes. They immediately burst into flames and in a matter of seconds left only ashes behind.

After looking around once more he decided he would have to return in order to really understand what was in here. Not wanting to use the portkey, he transapparated through the wards of Gringotts and far away from Diagon Alley to a rickety old house. He felt no guilt at not disclosing this little feat to the goblins, they wouldn't know anyway since he didn't actually use apparition which would have set off the alarms. What no one knew wouldn't hurt them, or me, he thought.

Looking around, the house wasn't in the best of shape but it would serve him well. It was the closest to where he needed to be and he didn't want to jeopardize his other properties. It would need some fixing up, at least on the inside. The outside would appear the same to all those passing by.

The transformation was beginning a full onslaught on him now so painfully he walked up the half dilapidated stairwell to the second floor, choosing the room at the far end of the hall he conjured a nice warm bed. Knowing it was only a matter of time before they discovered him missing, he cast a few wards around the bed to prevent anyone from seeing him if they happened to get into the house. Without removing an ounce of clothing he fell upon the bed and was soon fast asleep encompassed by darkness and pain. No dreams or visions invaded his thoughts.

## Chapter 3—Beginning a New Life

Several days later Harry awoke feeling refreshed. He reveled at having his muscular 5'11' frame back. Although not bulky, his muscles were hardened with long hours of physical activity and sword fighting in the other realm. His reflexes were quicker and he was very agile. Although not vane, he was very proud of his body now, not the mousy little boy he once was. He didn't remember much about the last couple of days except for the continuous pain that radiated throughout his body. No matter what position he had lain in his body protested, until oblivion set in. He figured that he had slept for a full day after the transformation was fully completed but he couldn't be sure. He would have to check in town to see what day it was and how much he actually missed during that time.

Making sure that his disguise was in place, just in case someone walked by before he was finished, Harry set to work on his new home. He wanted to make it safe and comfortable for the time he would be spending here. Later he could use it as a safe house if necessary. Although, if what he suspected was true, he wouldn't need it. First thing he cast was the Fidellius Charm around his new home, it was an advanced and ancient version that would prevent detection of magic and caused the house to look like the same old run down shack to all that passed by and if any dared enter it would seem a hollow burned out shell. He placed several wards around the place strong enough to prevent portkeys and apparition as well as alarms to notify him of anyone approaching within a ½ mile. This would allow him to observe or set a trap as the intruder would not be able to hear them. He wondered casually why they didn't use these alarms at the ministry or Azkaban. 'Oh well their loss' he shrugged it off. Maybe there was no one powerful enough to set them up. He knew he was stronger and more powerful than several wizards combined and at least twice as strong as Dumbledore if not much more.

After casting several charms to clean the place up and provide a steady foundation, he worked on the interior of the home. He was impressed with his decorating ability, 'Guess all that time really did provide me with a real imagination!' he chuckled to himself. It wasn't anything extraordinary, but simple, charming and comfortable. The main floor consisted of a living room with a fireplace, a kitchen, library

and storage/laundry room, the upstairs maintained 4 bedrooms with two full bathrooms. Harry knew what the basement provided and sealed the trap door solid and alarmed it against any use except his. Satisfied with his new home he decided to take a stroll around the nearby village to see how much time he was out of it and what had transpired.

Deciding to find out about the current state of affairs he went to the post office to get a current copy of the Daily Prophet and then headed to the Three Broomsticks for a light lunch. Reading while he ate he didn't notice a small group enter and take up a seat in at the table next to him. He could care less about the inhabitants of the village. That wasn't necessarily true though, he didn't want any harm to come to any of them but his thoughts kept being forced back to his current plans which also had the unfortunate side effect of making him think about previous friends and family which he was still unsure how to deal with, especially after all the recent revelations. Forcing himself to concentrate on the articles in the paper about how much of a disturbance he was causing not only the Ministry of Magic but one Albus Dumbledore by breaking out of Azkaban he was distracted by familiar voices engaged in a conversation taking place beside him.

"What do you think will happen now that he's out?" asked a high pitched scared male voice.

"What do you think he'll do Ron? Probably run right back to his master. I still can't believe he joined them, how could we not see it until too late! Of all people I really thought Harry hated V-Voldemort, I can't believe we were his friends!" said a studious female voice.

"I'm not so sure Hermione," said a very quiet familiar voice that reminded him of something...he couldn't remember what. "I mean there are so many questions that keep coming up," the voice broke down in tears.

"Come on Ginny, you honestly can't tell me after all this time that you're still going on about him being innocent!"

"Ron, think about it please! Why did he escape Azkaban?"

"That's easy Ginny. He wants to return to help his master." The male voice continued snidely.

"Yeah Ginny, the evidence was clear as day, and..."

"Hermione don't you see it? He didn't even get to testify let alone be questioned under Veritaserum. Why was Percy even there?"

"I'm sick of this! How many times do we have to go through this Ginny? He was guilty!"

"I'm not so sure any more Ron!" Ginny said in an angry whisper. "Sirius broke out of Azkaban too! He was innocent..."

"Just because he escaped doesn't mean he's innocent Ginny. You can't be seriously thinking their situations are one in the same? I mean really Peter Pettigrew was the one at fault for Sirius's imprisonment and Sirius didn't even get a trial. By law everything was done to ensure Potter was ...."

"Hermione sometimes you amaze me with how stupid you can actually be. Really! By Law! By law, his trial would have been fair, innocent until proven guilty. By law he would have been able to testify in his own defense. By law he would have been given Veritaserum. By law he could have submitted his memory to a Pensieve for everyone to evaluate. Can you really be such a self righteous know it all to overlook all that?"

"That was uncalled for Ginny! Hermione's the smartest witch of her age. If anyone would know that the law was followed it would be her."

"Exactly Ron! And it wasn't! Did you even spend any time looking for a defense for Harry to ensure the law was followed? No! None of us did!"

"I've had enough of this Ginny! Let's get off this topic. We came here to have a nice lunch. We've got a lot of other things to think about with the order's involvement in the war and everything. Potter's just another Death Eater to be taken out. Dumbledore and the Order will take care of him like he deserves."

“Ron! I can’t believe you! Talking about the Order in public....Dumbledore warned us.” She finished in a scowling whisper.

“Come on Hermione whose gonna hear us here or even know what we’re talking about?”

Harry sat contemplating their conversation. He was infuriated by the ignorance and anger shown by his former best friends. Ron was a git, no need explaining his reaction, but Hermione he didn’t get. She claimed to know all about the law. Must have read it somewhere. Her and her damn precious book learning; didn’t really get that the law could be wrong. Did she seriously miss the part that Ginny was trying to explain? Did she really think laws were infallible? That even government officials broke the law when ever it best served their needs? Didn’t she see that laws were made by those very same officials who were only out for themselves and made more than their fair share of mistakes? ‘Guess your books don’t teach everything Hermione’ he thought.

‘And what about Ginny?’ Did she really believe he was innocent? When did she start questioning it? She didn’t look like she believed him during the trial. What made her change her mind?

Madame Rosmerta’s voice cut into his thoughts as she approached ‘his friends’ table to take their orders. He heard everyone make their selection then the pompous voice of Ron spoke up, “Oh and just charge it to our vault it’s on me.” He said pompously, puffing out his chest importantly.

Harry had to stifle the laughter that was bubbling up inside him at the view. Could he honestly think himself so important because of money? Did he not see how much like the Malfoy’s he was acting? As he looked up he noticed Rosey roll her eyes at the git and again fought against the giggles.

“As you wish Mr. Weasley, I’ll be back shortly.” Quiet ensued at their table and Harry continued to read his paper. Shortly Madame Rosmerta returned a little more agitated than before.

"I'm sorry Mr. Weasley there seems to be a slight problem."

"What is it?"

"Well, I don't know how to say this, but it seems that the vault you gave me doesn't exist." Harry could tell she was desperately trying to conceal her smirk at the expression of outrage on the be freckled red heads face. 'Serves him right, Harry thought, 'looks like the git needs to be knocked down a peg or too. Hermione could stand for a good kick in the arse as well! Had they been this pompous when they were friends? Merlin please tell me I wasn't like that too!'

"What! We've been using that vault for the last year! There's plenty of money in it and today was supposed to be the day when it was refilled!"

So the bastard knew about the circumstances around the trust vault! It lifted Harry's spirits even more to realize just how much of a blow this would actually be to the conniving ponce.

"It's not that there isn't any money, the vault has been closed. So how would you like to pay?"

Harry had had enough, he knew those three, they had been his best friends and before the trial Harry had hoped to get to know Ginny better. He had felt guilty after learning how she was still having nightmares about the chamber and no one had been there to help her. After learning about this he wanted to try and help, she had been there for him and he wanted to return the favor and find out more about the fiery red head. 'What are you thinking Potter! Is this what Sirius and his parents were hinting at? Did he have deeper feelings for the youngest Weasley? Get over it! You have other things to do now!' Although it talking to himself didn't help much, his heart wrenched as what they said filtered through his conflicting thoughts.

Slamming up his mental barricades and sorting this conversation to the depths of his mind he stood abruptly and walked away. Grinning to himself, he was satisfied that at least no one would be able to use his families assets anymore. Strike one for Potter! He was about to exit when he forgot to pay and walked over to his table noticing the



three looking at him sharply. He saw the red face of an angry Ron Weasley he smiled casually at them all as he threw more than enough galleons to cover his meal down hard on the table. The sound of gold galleons striking hard on the wooden table caused his former friends to flinch slightly and his smile grew a fraction of an inch. Rosey smiled appreciatively at him and he nodded in reply. He saw out of the corner of his eye Ron glare at him then grabbed his half eaten sandwich and paper and headed out the door. 'I wonder how the rest of the 'family' will react to the news of their lively hood being cut off?' Harry thought, satisfied by the initial reaction of Ron. Briefly he reflected on how this would affect Ginny but then again she was stealing his money without remorse too wasn't she?

Meandering outside the village he came upon a peaceful stream and sat down on the edge stretching his legs out before him while he finished eating and reading his newspaper. He was disgusted with the lies about him and his life and was furious at how pompous Cornelius Fudge was, how could that ignorant git still be in office? It was an outrage to wizarding kind! They said he was a dangerous criminal! Well dangerous might be true but he was definitely no criminal! He was more determined than ever to prove them all wrong.

Looking around to ensure no-one was watching, even though he already knew no one was around, he took off his shirt and shoes and began to practice his katras. It had always helped him in the past to concentrate solely on the precise movements that caused his body to move in intricate but demanding motions. Sweat was soon pouring over his cut features, accentuating his well developed muscles. He desperately wanted to practice with his swords but that would attract attention that he didn't need and lead to unanswerable questions. The katras would keep his reflexes in check even though he missed the familiar weight of the swords. As he concentrated more on his movements all thoughts were swept from his mind as his body fell into the familiar routine. Instead of becoming cut off from the world his senses soared with awareness, he could feel the soft breeze as it wafted through the air, could sense its current and path. The smell of the sweet summer grass and flowers caressed his smell with some other faint smell intermingled. He could hear the birds in the trees, the insects flying in their busy flight for life, the fish swimming in the stream and the footsteps of someone approaching. Without breaking

concentration he pushed his magic out to sense who was approaching..

Feeling embarrassed not only by the lack of money to buy lunch but the conversation she had shared with her best friend and brother, Ginny wanted to be alone and decided to meet up with Ron and Hermione later. She had wanted to get a few items and knew that Hermione and Ron wanted some time alone since they didn't get that at the burrow, but now that would have to wait until she could figure out what was going on with her parents and the vault. Why would they close the vault? There was still plenty of money in there and if she had heard her father correctly, they would have more money again on Harry's birthday. The thought filled her with remorse, how could they do this to Harry? It was dirty money! Even if Harry was guilty they shouldn't be stealing from him for that's all she thought it could be. She knew she was the only one to think that way. Ron thought it was poetic justice and flaunted it at every opportunity. The rest of the family wasn't much better, her parents had totally renovated the burrow. Although it still looked pretty much the same, the foundation was made stronger and more rooms were added and the furnishings inside had been completely replaced. She liked having new clothes and things, but she wasn't proud of how she came by them. That was one of the reasons she decided to take her twin brothers offer of working for them over the summer at their new shop in Hogsmeade. She liked the satisfaction she felt in earning her money honestly and not using Harry's money, even though she accepted what her parents and brothers bought her.

Having every intention to go straight back to the joke shop, she was inextricably drawn to the river by the edge of town. Her breath caught in a gasp as she beheld an exquisite sight. There standing by the bank of the river, well not really standing, he was moving somehow in different ways but it was so smooth and elegant that it looked like a dance of some sort, was a gorgeous man. Not just any man but one with dark brown hair, black pants that seemed to flow with his movements and no shirt. It was this that had caused Ginny's breath to be taken away. His shoulders were broad but not too broad and tightly muscled, his arms were the same, she could see the veins crisscrossing over the flexing biceps, they were not big and bulky, but more lean and powerful. His smooth hairless chest was cut to a fine

edge and tapered into a small waist where she could see the ripple of his stomach muscles. He was a dream, just like those hunks she always saw in Teen Witch Weekly. She lost herself in imagining him taking her into his arms and kissing her passionately, but shook herself out of the day dream. She realized that this was the same man that had been sitting next to them in the Three Broomsticks. Scolding herself for looking at him when she never thought she would feel this way about anyone but Harry, she was about to turn around when she heard someone talking to her.

“Is there something I can help you with Ma’am?” The voice was a deep rich voice that held a mixture of sarcasm, amusement, anger, and, was that pain? Something about his voice was very familiar but she couldn’t place it.

Looking up she saw the object of her admiration looking at her and quickly pulling his tight black T-shirt over his head.

“Oh, sorry, thought you were someone else.” She said and turned and quickly ran back into Hogsmeade with her thoughts all a flutter. She wouldn’t mention this to anyone; no she would be true to Harry no matter how his time in prison would make him look. If he ever got out of prison and forgave them she would wait for him. Oh how she longed for a strong handsome man to come into her life though. All her friends were dating and she longed to feel loved and cherished. Her family quickly bored her; she never thought they were so closed minded about things until after the trial. They wouldn’t even look to see if there was any other reason. Hell, no one had even questioned why Percy was at Harry’s house; she somehow felt that was important. Shaking it off she found she was outside her brothers shop and suddenly felt the need to be doing something physical, anything to take her mind off Harry.

Harry stood bracingly at the rivers edge watching a beet red Ginny running back into town. He had known the moment she arrived and was curious at her scrutiny. Of course she hadn’t known it was him but she still kept watching as Harry performed his katras. The conversation at the Three Broomsticks floated back into his thoughts and he was curious at her response then as well, could she possibly believe him innocent? Was there hope that maybe someone would

piece together the puzzle of his innocence? NO, can't think about that now, they all betrayed him, they all screamed at him that he had betrayed them, they all stole from him thinking it justified for his false crimes. She thought he was guilty didn't she? But,...Damn this was confusing! No, he wouldn't wait for them to figure it out on their own. He wouldn't forgive them for turning their backs; he wouldn't forget the intense pain they caused and the year at Azkaban. The insanity they had caused him, the demoralizing taunts of the prison guards, the Dementors causing him to relive every painful memory! Harry felt the anger surging within him and finally realized he had to cool down and get control of himself. Even though he had been sent to Azkaban he had to be thankful that at least he wasn't in there as long as Sirius. His godfather had spent 12 fucking years in hell because of the impotent officials at the Ministry of Magic. Thinking of this reminded him of the other realm and the numerous discussions he had with Sirius and his parents about all this. He had four wonderful years with them and felt ashamed at his loss of control even if it was only momentary. "Never be ashamed of showing your emotions even when they sometimes seem to overwhelm you. You are only human Harry, and we all have instances like that. Sometimes it is a very good thing to cry or get angry and especially to love" he heard the voice of his mother echo in his mind and felt better. She was trying to tell him not to be ashamed but to work on it. He thanked the Fates and his friends and family in the other realm silently and admitted to himself that if it hadn't been for Azkaban he might not have ever had the opportunity to see them. If only that had been the purpose behind them sending him to hell, he thought, but knew it wasn't. Shaking himself out of this unproductive chain of thoughts he apparated back to his new home and started preparing for the night ahead.

Night fell as a dark blanket over the unsuspecting folk of a quaint rural town on the shores of the North Sea, creating ominous shadows dance in the light of the street lamps that had illuminated. It was late and most people were tucked securely into their warm comfortable beds, however, this night there were more than a few sinister criminals afoot. They stalked stealthily towards their quarry, a two story insignificant looking home. The family presiding within was oblivious to the fact that they were the next target of the wizarding worlds most notorious Dark Lord. The young 13 year old daughter of this common muggle family happened to attend Hogwarts School of

Witchcraft and Wizardry. Although they new a little of what was going on in the wizarding world they never imagined the true extent to which the Dark Lord would go.

Death Eaters surrounded the home in their black cloaks and white masks, waiting for the moment to strike. Anxious tension in the air gathered thick around the house in anticipation of their nighttime entertainment. The last light went out in the home and the Death Eaters crept closer to the front door barely able to contain their excitement. A branch snapped somewhere and the group went deathly still looking around for the source of the noise. After several moments of absolute silence where the wind could be heard on its lazy path they sighed collectively and turned back to their prey. Before they could register anything was wrong one of their numbers was standing in the doorway looking back to the group.

Lucious Malfoy was furious; he was to be the first into the house, the first with the honor to start the torture of the filthy mudbloods. He was about to step forward and demand how this low ranking Death Eater dared usurp his right when the man moved quicker than he thought possible and blackness overtook him.

Harry watched silently as the Death Eaters prepared to move on the innocent family. He was almost gleeful when one of the idiots stepped on a dry branch making them all stop dead still in their tracks. He could smell the fear in the air coming from these evil beings. This distraction provided him with more than enough opportunity to step into the action. He knew who these men were by their magical auras. Quickly he stunned and bound Malfoy before he could speak and bound 3 more in tight cords.

The Death Eaters getting over their initial shock seeing 4 of their number taken out so quickly, sprang into action shouting curses and dodging the ones the dark man sent at them.

Counting silently to himself, Harry surveyed how best to take out the remaining Death Eaters. Turning invisible he levitated into the air and studied the unorganized straggle of the evil men below, frantically shooting curses in all directions trying to find where he had gone. He

couldn't believe the stupidity of these men. 'And everyone is supposed to be afraid of idiots such as these?'

Smoke from the destruction of the misdirected curses wafted into the air. Harry noticed several lights flashing in the distance and realized his time was coming to an end; somehow someone had noticed the smoke and called emergency services even through the wards he had set up. He checked them quickly and cursed himself for forgetting to put up muggle repelling charms to mask the events. Well, there was no help for it now, he would have to take them all out quicker than he had planned in order to salvage it. Soon the muggle police and emergency service teams would arrive on site and then, inevitably, the ministry would arrive. He couldn't risk not completing his plan before this all occurred so he set to work.

Refocusing his attention to the Death Eaters, Harry noticed 3 of them stood in a small circle a few meters apart, where if he timed it right he would make them take each other out. He apparated between them noiselessly and removed his invisibility spell, but they still didn't notice. Coughing loudly got their attention; Harry had to fight back a small chuckle threatening to escape his lips. It seemed they all noticed at the same instant and 2 Stupefy and a Killing Curse screamed towards him. Harry stood his ground waiting until the last minute then jumped into the air flipping backwards over one of the frightened men, while their curses finished each other off.

Seeing their numbers decimated so quickly, the remaining two Death Eaters that had been hiding behind a large oak decided to cut their losses and get the hell out of there. Harry watched them try to apparate with a triumphant smile on his face.

"Now, now boys, why would you want to end this intriguing game we're playing? I'm having more fun than I've had in over a year, and you're trying to end it. TSk TSK." He taunted as he closed in on them with a menacing gleam in his eyes.

The Death Eaters looked at each other quizzically when their attempt to apparate failed. They stared at the man stalking towards them with wand raised and fear filled them. The power radiating off the man

was awesome as he raised his wand and shot something solid out of his wand into the shoulder of one of the dark men who disappeared.

Harry was pleased with the response the Death Eaters showed to his little display of power, but was reminded of the short time he had left as the sirens now screamed through the night getting closer with each passing second. The copper phoenix button portkey seemed to work perfectly leaving one last Death Eater standing who immediately fell to his knees begging for mercy. Harry put him out of action with his own special Stupefy curse then turned to survey the scene around him. He was pleased that only one Death Eater was actually dead, and the fact that it had been one of their own that had done it. He stunned the remaining Death Eater and quickly took out his trunk unshrinking it, then threw 6 of the unconscious men into his trunk locking it and shrinking it again. He placed it securely into a pocket in his robes. Taking his special stunner off the one remaining Death Eater he stunned him with a normal stunner so the ministry aurors would be able to revive him.

He smiled to himself as he contemplated the reactions of the aurors back at the ministry to a Death Eater suddenly appearing in their offices out of nowhere. Just wait until they see this he said to himself once again sweeping the sight with his gaze. He knew all hell was about to break loose and he didn't care, it was payback time and his plans were only just beginning to unfold.

Leaving the dead Death Eater and one unconscious one to be taken care of by the Ministry Aurors, he apparated away to his home. Harry quickly enlarged his trunk and entered into the chamber containing the unconscious Death Eaters still lying in a mangled pile on the floor. Stripping and disarming them off all personal possessions, most importantly their wands and anything that could be used as a weapon, he threw them unceremoniously into their own bleak cells. He didn't bother to enervate them knowing that only he could do it, but he wasn't ready to interrogate them yet. Instead, he destroyed all their wands and sorted through the pile of robes, weapons and miscellaneous objects that turned out to be portkeys. Harry surmised that they were escape portkeys and may come in handy later in his plans so he sealed them in a magical lock box. Feeling the drain of the evening he climbed out of the trunk and sank heavily onto his new

couch rubbing his tired eyes under his glasses. Wishing he had something strong to drink he decided to rectify that tomorrow, but tonight he would enjoy a nice hot bath and try to sleep.

As he climbed the stairs to the second floor exhaustion caused his bones and muscles to ache. It had only been a short time since he was out of Azkaban and actually moving in the real world was taking its toll. He had to readjust to it by giving himself more time, but that was one thing he knew he didn't have the luxury of, especially so soon after his transformation. Sighing he leaned over the large bath and turned on the water, also turning on several other spouts that added calming and pain relievers to the water. Stripping, he gingerly placed a foot in the water and found it immediately comfortable and sank the rest of his body down into it. Reflecting on the night's events he found that, although successful, he felt disappointed. The elation he had thought he would feel wasn't there and knew that it wasn't because of Voldemort and his Death Eaters. He wanted his friends to believe him, wanted them to be by his side again, but knowing that was almost impossible with the way things were. Pain enveloped him; he could deal with the physical pain but not this kind. The memories and emotions of a year ago pressed upon him reminding him of the love that was lost, the trust that was gone, and the family that was no longer. How could they believe he could kill anyone? Sure he hated the Dursley's but even his friends knew that he couldn't kill them. He barely knew Mrs. Figg, sure she babysat him when the Dursley's didn't want to take him with them, and she had even testified for him before his fifth year, so why would he do that to her and Percy? Sure Percy was the biggest git, but what could he possibly have against him, other than the fact that Percy didn't like him and tried to interfere with Ron and Harry's friendship. That wasn't enough for them to believe he would kill was it?

How could Dumbledore think he had turned? Dumbledore! The wisest and most powerful wizard of the age, what an overstatement! He couldn't even see Harry's innocence, didn't even investigate into why Percy was at his house uninvited. Why the wards failed to go off alerting the Ministry and the Order. The old man lied and stole from him, he couldn't be trusted!



“STOP!” Harry screamed grabbing at his head in a vain effort to stop the thoughts swimming around creating more doubt, anger, guilt and pain. Standing up quickly he almost lost his balance as he slipped on the slippery bottom of the bath. Grabbing onto the rim of the bath he caught himself and took several deep calming breaths concentrating on his occlumency and forcing the memories back, locking them away. He would deal with them another day. This was going to be much harder than he thought. In the other realm he had talked about this very thing with Sirius and his parents and knew it would be hard, but he never imagined it to be this hard. Seeing his former friends and family again just brought up all the memories in a harsher light. Drying himself off with a soft towel; never had these in Azkaban, hell he didn't even have these at the Dursley's, he took a long hard look at himself in the mirror and vowed things would be set right. He stepped into a clean pair of boxers and reaching into the cabinet above the sink took out a vial of dreamless sleep potion he had obtained in Hogsmeade the other day. Barely making it to his bed before falling asleep he drank the potion quickly. As he dozed off he made a note to himself to be careful with the Dreamless Sleep potion as it was very addictive and he didn't want to become reliant on it.

While Harry slept peacefully chaos reigned at the ministry and at the Montgomery's house. He would have been pleased beyond mention to see the reaction of the Aurors when the Death Eater popped into the ministry. Those on night duty sat at their desks filling out reports or propping their feet on their desks thinking about the next attack and when it would happen. Needless to say they were shocked silly when a dark robed and white masked man appeared in a crumpled mess on the floor in the middle of the office. Kingsley Shacklebolt was sitting at a desk right next to where the man appeared and regained his senses quicker than the rest of the Aurors. He had the man magically restrained within a minute after he arrived and then the questions started. The man stubbornly refused to answer until one of the other aurors approached with a vial of veritaserum. The man flinched away not wanting to take the truth serum but he was held forcibly while three drops were spilled into his magically opened mouth.

“Who are you?” Kingsley asked harshly.

“Michael Withershins.” The man answered tonelessly.

“What are you doing here?” another auror nearly shouted.

“I don’t know. I was on a mission at the Montgomery’s for my Lord and master when a dark robed man stepped out and attacked us, he took all the others out and then shot something at me and now I am here.”

“How many Death Eaters were there?”

“9”

The other aurors looked to Kingsley in confusion and disbelief. How could one man take out so many of them on his own? Kingsley was also astonished but quickly covered his reactions.

“Search his robes” Kingsley ordered, and a female auror with bright pink hair began running her hands all over the disgusting Death Eater searching for a portkey. She couldn’t find anything out of the ordinary and her shoulders slumped in failure. She looked at Kingsley then back to the man sitting on the floor. Her eyes caught upon a copper button on his shoulder. ‘That’s an odd place for a button’ then she looked closer and saw the silver phoenix design on the button and tapped it with her wand.

Kingsley smiled in satisfaction when Tonks found the portkey and ordered two of the aurors to detain the prisoner while he, Tonks and a few others would follow the portkey back to its originating point. Tonks thought it was too easy, almost as if the portkey was made by an amateur, but if the man attacked and was able to take out so many Death Eaters, surely he was powerful and able to make a portkey more difficult to trace, however she couldn’t identify the aura of the maker. Mentioning this to Kingsley in a whisper he nodded his head in agreement and before they left he sent off a secret missive to Headmaster Albus Dumbledore.

Enlarging the button so 10 aurors could use the portkey; Kingsley tapped it with his wand reversing the direction of the portkey and activating it. Seconds later they arrived on the front lawn of the

Montgomery's and surveyed the area finding a dead body and one unconscious Death Eater. Kingsley sent Tonks into the house to check on the family while he obliterated the police and sent the other aurors to do the same to the other emergency service people and onlookers. Soon all unnecessary people left the scene and the aurors began their cleanup of the area. Tonks came back out of the house and reported to Kingsley that the family was unaware of anything that had happened, but after a quick search they found that a powerful silencing charm had been placed over the house preventing the family from hearing the battle or knowing of the pending attack. She had placed a memory charm on the family so they would forget she had ever questioned them about the evening and Kingsley nodded his approval.

"What do we do now?" Tonks asked, worry straining her voice.

Kingsley knew what she was thinking, another powerful wizard loose and running free was not something they needed to deal with right now with Voldemort and his Death Eaters raping the country. "I think we need to finish up here and see Dumbledore," he whispered.

After cleaning up and disposing of the dead body, Kingsley ordered the remaining aurors to return to the ministry. He would personally take care of the unconscious Death Eater. Although the aurors didn't know what Kingsley had in mind they weren't about to ask and apparated from the area.

Albus Dumbledore was sitting at his desk lost in thought over the latest news from the Daily Prophet and was surprised when an owl burst into his office with a note tied to it. It was short but intriguing; Kingsley was obviously worried about a Death Eater showing up in his office unaware and a battle taking place without them knowing. Even more disconcerting was that apparently one wizard was able to take out 9 Death Eaters but only two were found at the scene. Who could this man be? Dumbledore frowned not wanting to believe that there was another powerful wizard loose in Great Britain that he didn't know about. His thoughts drifted back to the news article reporting that Harry James Potter had escaped from Azkaban prison a few days ago. Why so late? How did they not know immediately that he was gone, and why couldn't they trace him? Disturbing news, and

now there was a powerful wizard taking out Death Eaters. Could it possibly be? No! Harry turned on them all, he became a servant of Tom, and he wouldn't take out his own brethren, he didn't even have a wand. The boy only had a 5th years magical education! But who else?

As he pondered the many questions fighting for attention in his mind his fireplace roared to life. Dumbledore turned expectantly to the fire and watched as Kingsley Shacklebolt then Nymphadora Tonks stepped out with an unconscious black robed man.

"Sorry Albus didn't know where else to take him for questioning and thought you might like a chance at him before the ministry." Kingsley said shrugging his shoulders.

The old man's eyes sparkled a second and he nodded, motioning for Tonks to place the man in one of the chairs. After restraining him, he made a fire call to Professor Snape to bring up a vial of veritaserum. He felt slightly guilty for using the restricted potion but he needed answers and the ministry was short on those these days. Fudge was ever the incompetent minister, and made a mockery of the justice system to benefit himself. If he didn't question this man now under truth serum, he would most likely be let go by the ministry. It didn't even occur to him that he was giving this Death Eater the chance he had never given one of his own students and supposed savior of the world.

They were brought out of their personal reminiscences by a knock on the door.

"Come in" the voice of the headmaster sounded through the silence.

Snape entered ever the smug, pretentious man swirling his capes behind him and handed the vial to the headmaster. He ignored everyone else in the room expecting some explanation from the headmaster.

"May I ask why this is needed?" he asked not noticing the form slouching in the chair behind him.

Dumbledore just pointed to the man with a slight gleeful smirk that his ever attentive potions master had missed the man. Snape whipped around and saw him. Taking a step closer he ripped off the mask of the man and gasped.

“That is Goyle! How did he, how did you.....”

Kingsley stepped forward to explain and was greeted by a sneer from the greasy haired man.

“We found him unconscious at the scene of the latest Death Eater attack, The Montgomery’s. They are all alive and do not remember anything of the battle. Apparently whoever stopped the attack was able to place a silencing charm around the house to prevent them from hearing anything. Another Death Eater named Michael Withershins appeared in our office before we learned of the attack and told us that one man appeared before they had a chance to enter the house and took out 9 Death Eaters. We found another dead at the scene and the ministry is now attempting to discern his identity. How come you didn’t know about this Snape?”

“I...I....the Dark Lord is not a trusting person, he only tells his plans to the people involved right before an attack. He suspects a spy amongst his followers. I was not involved so therefore I was not told.” Snape answered haughtily.

“Interesting,” Dumbledore said. “I think it best you leave before I wake Mr. Goyle and question him Severus.” He finished, it was a pleasantly voiced order and Snape knew it. With a swish of his black cloak he turned on his heels and left the room.

An hour later the three had exhausted their questions, but the answers seemed to cause even more questions about the mysterious man in black. After obliterating Goyle’s memory of being questioned he let Kingsley and Tonks take the man to the ministry and ordered an emergency meeting of the Order for tomorrow morning.

Dumbledore waited quietly in the kitchen of number 12 Grimmauld Place while the Order members arrived and situated themselves around the table. He noticed the fear that shone in their eyes and

anticipated the questions they would ask. He was sure that they all knew that Harry Potter had escaped and it was clear that they suspected it was this topic they were called to discuss. They looked haggard and worn from the constant battles with Voldemort and his followers but none more so than Remus Lupin. He had a haunted surreal look in his eyes as he stared past them all without seeing, his clothes even more unkempt than normal. He sighed as he realized all this man had lost, but never admitted that he had made the mistake that had caused the loss.

Confirming that all members were present, Dumbledore cast a silencing and imperturbable charm around the room and everyone fell silent waiting for him to speak.

"I assume you are all aware that Mr. Potter has escaped from Azkaban." Several breathed in sharply at the abruptness of the statement and everyone looked to each other to find that their worst fears were now confirmed. Remus stiffened in his seat. "It is curious that we did not learn about this until several days after the escape, does anyone here know why?"

He waited for an answer but none came. "Then I am to assume that the Ministry has even tighter control on the breach of useful information. I fear that we will have to take up where the Ministry cannot. They have not been able to locate Mr. Potter, we will have to send out search teams to find him and bring him in."

"Bring him in?" Mr. Weasley asked.

"Yes Arthur, he is dangerous, we cannot have him rejoining Voldemort. The war is already favoring the dark side and Mr. Potter would inevitably sway the slight balance to their favor." He said with anger. "Although Mr. Potter has not yet finished school, if he joins Voldemort he will learn Dark Magic and I'm afraid that with this help Mr. Potter may become more powerful than the Dark Lord himself."

"This is all too familiar" Remus spoke up. "This is almost the same line of rhetoric that was spouted when Sirius was on the run. Dark Wizard bah! Harry would never join someone that murdered his parents!" he shouted angrily at Dumbledore.

“Remus we have heard enough of your views on the subject. Unfortunately you are wrong as the evidence has proven his guilt. Harry is not and never will be Sirius, there is no similarity between them.” Dumbledore answered his growing anger apparent in his voice.

“Think about it Albus, who else do you know that escaped Azkaban? Why did he escape? Because he was innocent damn it! Oh God what have we done?” he cried dropping his head shakily into his hands.

“He is not innocent as was Sirius, Remus, we have evidence, we were able to prove.....” Molly Weasley spoke up, she couldn’t believe the nonsense Remus was spouting.

“Just like we were able to prove Sirius’s guilt? We never gave him veritaserum which would easily have cleared his name. We didn’t learn from our mistakes! We didn’t allow that small bit of evidence to be proven by Veritaserum during Harry’s trial either. He asked it to be used, he begged us and he was ignored! Bloody Hell Albus, can’t you see the similarities? How could he have escaped if he was supposed to be insane? Isn’t that what Azkaban does to people that are guilty? Those damned Dementors constantly reminding them of all the horrors they committed in life? Why didn’t Harry go insane? Because HE WAS INNOCENT! DAMN YOU DUMBLEDORE FOR KEEPING ME AWAY! I COULD HAVE TESTIFIED, INSISTED HE BE GIVEN THE DAMN SERUM BUT YOU WOULDN’T LET ME!”

“Remus, calm down,” Molly Weasley spoke up trying to comfort the irate man.

Glaring at those present, Remus stopped and took several breaths trying to calm down, but it wasn’t working. As he glanced around the room at his friends, he couldn’t believe what they had done, what he had done to Harry. ‘Please James and Lily, please forgive me for what I’ve done to your son’ he whispered to himself grief stricken. Without another word he left the room.

Silence remained in the kitchen as no-one knew what to say. Various thoughts filled the members in the room. ‘Harry innocent? No way! He killed Percy and the Dursley’s and Mrs. Figg! Slowly the interruption

that Remus had caused was filled with angry shouts about the ludicrous statements Remus had made about the Boy-Who-Lived and they once again felt secure in the knowledge that what they had done was right.

"You don't think that Remus could be right do you?" Arthur Weasley asked with doubt.

"I do not believe that Harry Potter is innocent Arthur. Now does anyone have any leads as to where Potter may be hiding?"

Molly looked at her husband with obvious question in her eyes which Dumbledore didn't miss. "Molly is there something you have to tell us? Anything, no matter how small it may seem could prove to be helpful."

"Well,....the other day Ron came home ranting about our vault being closed. The one that was signed over to us by the Ministry after the incident, the one that....."

"The one that once belonged to Mr. Potter?" Albus asked.

Arthur nodded in response confirming that the vault in question was indeed the one that was Harry's.

"What do you mean closed Molly?"

Arthur picked up the story from there, "Well Molly came and told me that Ron, Hermione and Ginny went to the Three Broomsticks for lunch but that they couldn't charge it to the vault. Madame Rosmerta told them the vault had been closed and the children thought we had closed it because they were spending too much. We went to the bank later and were told that the vault had been dissolved by the controlling heir. Of course we didn't know who could have done that so we had Bill look into it, but he couldn't find anything out for us. We don't know any more than that. Quite confusing really."

"Arthur, I do believe that this is most enlightening information." Dumbledore hid his surprise and worry at this revelation. He knew he would have to get to Gringotts soon to check on his investments. He



hoped this would all just wind up being a misunderstanding with the bank.

“Please do explain headmaster” Snape sneered.

Dumbledore snapped out of his thoughts, “Well that vault was Mr. Potter’s trust fund, established to provide for Harry while he was not yet of age. The money came directly from the Potter Family Vault each year. We have not yet been able to access the Potter Family Vault to gain control of it as only a blood relation can enter it. Which means that a blood relation has turned up and gained control of the vault. This individual must have learned about the trust vault and closed it out. This individual must have been angry about what Potter had done and closed it not realizing that the Ministry had already turned it over to others as reparation.”

“Potter doesn’t have any remaining relatives. This is absurd headmaster! Obviously someone has figured out how to bypass the protections. What did we overlook? Potter is a criminal, surely there is some way to convince the Ministry to take control.” Snape stated angrily. There were a lot of riches rumored to be within the Potter vault and it infuriated him that someone else now had control. He was looking forward to being able to get into the vault of his former rival and making him pay for everything he had done. It was an added bonus that Harry Potter would also suffer from it.

“No, you are quite correct Severus. Mr. Potter does not have any remaining blood relatives, which leads me to believe that the only one that is in control of those vaults is Mr. Potter himself. The question of controlling the vault is not a matter for the Ministry as such ancient vaults as the Potter’s are controlled by blood magic which fall directly under the control of Gringotts.”

“That can’t be Albus!” squeaked out Minerva McGonagal.

“I’m afraid that is the most logical answer. Somehow Mr. Potter has accessed his vaults and in so doing has gained control of them. Arthur, if you would please look into any ministry documents filed within the last several days I think we may find our answer there. We

may yet be able to take some action if that is the case, let us hope that the Ministry is as slow as it normally is in these matters.”

“I will look into it first thing tomorrow. What do you think has been filed? It may help narrow the search; hundreds of records are filed every day.”

“I believe Arthur that Mr. Potter may have filed for his emancipation. I fear there may be more to this than we realize.”

“How so Albus?”

“Moody, I believe somehow Mr. Potter has also found out about Sirius’s will and in so doing has discovered that he is not only the controlling heir of the Potter Vault but also of the Black Family Vault. If he has uncovered these items, then I am afraid he has also found out about the Order’s funds.”

“The Order has a fund? You mean a vault?” Tonks asked, seriously curious about these revelations from the usually evasive headmaster.

“Yes the Order has a fund that was established at the end of the last war. If Mr. Potter has found out about this than he will be even more angry at us than he already is.”

“Out with it Albus. I think we need to know what we’re up against, and you have kept secrets for far too long.” Moody glared at his old friend.

“It is a mistake that only now I see, but then it seemed in the best interest of all involved.”

“What did you do?” Molly asked.

“Since I was given control over Mr. Potters trust fund by his parents I used some of the money to set up a trust of our own for the Order in case some day we were called upon to fight again. I believed at the time that his parents would approve of this action. I must go to Gringotts and look into this matter. For now keep this secret and continue the search. I will notify you all when we are to meet again. If his emancipation file has not been processed we may still be able to

control the course of this war and keep Voldemort from getting his hands on money that would only serve to bolster his forces.” Albus Dumbledore took one more glance around the room at his faithful supporters. Seeing the confused and shocked looks upon their faces he shook his head sadly and disappeared.

Slowly the remaining order members left to attend to their respective missions or to their own devices thinking that what the headmaster had done wasn't so terrible. In the light of things it was for the best interest of the wizarding world.

As the meeting was taking place Harry had already finished his morning workout and was now planning on going to Diagon Alley to stock up on items for his new home then go shopping in muggle London. After a quick shower, transfiguring his old robes and grabbing his shrunken trunk he apparated to the alley and sought out his first shop. Walking quickly he found a promising one, looking at the sign overhead it read 'Silven and Rusts—Restless Spirits'. Upon entering he heard a quiet jingle of bells announcing his presence and was quickly met by the proprietor.

“How may I help you Mr.....?”

Ignoring the mans attempt to get his name Harry told him what he was looking for. “I'm looking to re-stock my bar after quite a vivacious party and was hoping you would be able to help. Oh and money is no object.” Harry watched as the man's face turned from suspicious to overexcited when he mentioned money was no object. The obvious thrill of such a big sale overcoming any misgivings he might have had. The man quickly set to work picking numerous bottles off the shelf and placing them on the counter top, for awhile it seemed the man wouldn't stop until the sales counter was full of intricately made glass containers filled with a variety of liquor.

Reading the labels on the bottles Harry was clueless as to what they contained or how they would effect him but he didn't care. He would try each of them with relish; he was on his own and could do what he wanted. To hell with the bloody underage drinking shite. Scolding himself for this little attempt at rebellion he picked up each bottle and pretended to inspect it as he thought a connoisseur of fine liquor

would do. The man only looked at him approvingly and Harry took this as a good sign.

White's Winter ale—Always cold was one bottle with a snowy white liquid inside and frost covering the bottle.

Ogden's Firewhiskey—no need to inspect this one, Harry had heard enough about how the wizarding world loved this drink. Instead of one bottle he informed the proprietor he would need five.

Meanders off Plum Brandy, Kesorovs Blood red Vodka, Tartans Single Malt Scotch, Scutlins Vineyard Grand Reserve Merlot, Scutlins Vineyard Select Ice Chardonnay, and Ruthven Barracks War Chest Champaign, Nicholas's White Lightening Premium Schnapps, and several other bottles of fine wine and spirits covered the counter. Harry had no idea what he was getting into but shrugged it off and had the proprietor shrink the bottles and carefully package them so they wouldn't break while he continued his shopping. He would have a fine collection of spirits if he ever did decide to have anyone over.

The next stop was Madame Maulkins Robes for all Occasions where he bought 5 everyday robes one in red with gold trimming, one in green with black trimming and 3 in black. He also bought 2 new dress robes. He liked the feel of the silky material as it hung off his body and swayed with his every move. He also bought 2 work robes he could use while working around his new house or making potions he knew he would need.

"Do you know where I could get some muggle clothing?" he asked while she was wrapping up his purchases.

"Sure dear, just follow me, we have a large selection right next store, very popular with younger witches and wizards these days. Our supplier is a muggle born witch who has started her own fashion line. Quite the rave both here and in the muggle world." She replied leading him through a connecting door to a large shop next door.

Harry was enthralled with the variety but quickly set to work picking out new outfits. When he had finished he had 5 new pairs of jeans, 3 black and 2 stonewashed, 10 new shirts 5 with short sleeve and the

other 5 long, numerous pairs of socks, boxer and t-shirts, 5 pairs of shorts, 2 pairs of sweats, a pair of running shoes, trainers and a nice pair of black dress shoes. He also decided to buy several pairs of black dress pants and a couple dress shirts. He thought he was finished when Madame Maulkin suggested a few accessories to set off his new clothing, so he wound up with 3 new leather belts, 4 silk ties, a black sports coat and more dress socks. Pleased with his new clothing he placed them into a different compartment of his trunk and set off once again. By the end of the day he had acquired paintings, posters, a complete portable potions lab, potions ingredients, numerous books, parchment, self dictating quills, rugs, and of course food essentials. He had also signed into a contract with Tom, the bartender at the Leaky Cauldron to supply him with a case of butterbeer whenever he ran out. A special drop box was established that would alert Tom that Harry's supply was running low and all Tom had to do was place a new case in the box and it would appear in Harry's ice box. Of course it was made in a false name but Tom didn't seem to have noticed, and all transactions would be made through Griphook so his identity would be kept safe.

Casually strolling along Diagon Alley in disguise he spotted a familiar red head and decided to follow. After seeing the individuals' destination he was glad he had spotted her. Mrs. Weasley was making her regular shopping trip and unbeknownst to her, was helping Harry in solving one of his other dilemmas in supplying him with the knowledge of how to keep his food supplies stocked. He followed at a discreet distance then entered the store. Unlike a muggle food market, this shop was small and he couldn't see where the food was coming from. That is until Mrs. Weasley started stating what she wanted. It seemed the shop proprietor was repeating what she said and upon looking at the counter closer, he saw a self writing quill copying down the order. Waiting patiently he saw the proprietor disappear into a back room for awhile then reappear with several shrunken bags of groceries. Mrs. Weasley placed the bags in her purse then turned to leave. He nodded politely at her when she smiled at him. Oh what he wouldn't give to see that smile directed at him as his true self. Maybe in time he would have that but not for now. If she saw him as himself he was sure she would scream bloody hell shouting for aurors or curse him severely at the least. Shaking off the disheartening thoughts he quickly formed a checklist in his head and

approached the proprietor. After several minutes of discussion Harry was able to leave satisfied with a similar agreement he had made with Tom. Any food that he ordered would be placed in the drop box he had set up and appear in his ice box and the appropriate monies would be removed from the Evans vault.

Harry had made sure all of his purchases were discreet and the sheer amount it was costing him made the proprietors overlook any impropriety in the sales. His last stop was Gringotts to set up the authorization for the withdrawals by Tom and Mrs. Hernshal, the proprietor of the grocery.

He also went down to his family vaults as he wanted to obtain some of the family furniture he had seen in the Potter vault. He assumed correctly that the other vaults had similar items. Some of these items he would use to decorate his home and others would be used within his trunk. He didn't want to take too much though, as he knew the Shrieking Shack wouldn't be his permanent home. Full sets of armor he kept for his trunk as well as the family tapestries that contained his lineage for each. There was so much furniture, Harry was sure he would never use it all or find a place to house it other than the vaults. He also found battle robes which he knew would come in handy and protect him in a fight. He spent several hours in each vault quickly going through the contents but knew he would have to make several returns in order to completely understand everything they contained. Returning to his original purpose he shrunk the furniture and other items he was going to take and stored them in his trunk for transport.

Satisfied with his day out he returned to his home and put all his things away that needed tending immediately. The furniture and other decorations he would sort through tomorrow. Checking in his ice box, he was positively gleeful that his arrangement with Tom and Mrs. Hernshal was so quickly fulfilled. He then settled down to a nice hot meal and some Firewhiskey. At first it burned his throat going down and almost gave up on the drink but the warmth that spread after the fire calmed down gave him a dislocated comfortable feeling and he continued on into the night.

The next day he awoke to a splitting headache and upset stomach and swore to himself he wouldn't do that again. He now understood

why everyone warned about the hazards of getting drunk. Still liking the feeling the alcohol had given him he decided to take it slowly, only drinking a few glasses a night if any. Swearing off drinking before any night of action he thought he would be able to handle it.

Today of course he didn't feel liking getting out of bed, but his headache just wouldn't quit. Resigning himself to getting up he slipped into his trainers and a pair of sweats and left for a walk taking care to make sure he was disguised. After a short jog, his body just wasn't up to it today; he returned to the spot by the river and started his katras. The fluid movements and concentration relaxed his body and fought off the effects of the alcohol in his system. Although he had to admit it might just be timing. Once again he noticed Ginny sitting under the Oak Tree watching him and pretending not to, but he ignored her this time trying to work out what she was doing there. After 3 hours of steady work he was ravenous and didn't want to wait any longer to figure the beautiful red head out. She had changed a lot in the past year, no longer was she the shy, quiet girl with a crush on The-Boy-Who-Lived, or the little sister of his best friend. Her golden brown eyes shown with a life all their own, he could tell she was a combination of all the Weasley's with a temper to rival them all. Her brilliant red locks framed her pale freckled face and caressed it as it was blown by the breeze. How he would have liked to sweep it away from her face to feel the silky elegance of it. But it was not to be, somehow she had gotten over him and moved on. She was probably seeing someone else by now, and he was still an escaped convict. Even if he wasn't it would be impossible with Voldemort after him. He couldn't put anyone else in danger for just being with him. "Remember what we said Harry, live life to it's fullest for you do not know how long you may have. Volemort will already have won. We want you to be happy and live a long happy life. Have a family, a wife, children. Know love and return it Harry, that's how you will obtain happiness." A voice in his head reminded him. Geez this was hard! He was falling into the depression and anguish he experienced in Azkaban. He was powerful now and could put a stop to Voldemort easily but that wouldn't fall in place with the plans in life, he had to plan it all very carefully. Yes he could have a happy life, a normal life. For what was normal? It all depended on each individuals perspective. He had a lot of work ahead of him and none of it was going to be

easy. Feeling a bit better, he set off to the Three Broomsticks for a late lunch.

Ginny once again had been helping her brothers set up their new shop in Hogsmeade and decided to take her lunch break by the river. It was a peaceful sight in this time of war and helped her collect her thoughts. Ever since she had learned of the news of Harry's escape she was constantly worried. It hadn't been very long but no-one had been able to locate the escapee. Ginny worried if he was alright, if he was still sane, if he would come after their family again, if he was really guilty, where he would live, how he would live and what they would do to him once he was caught. Her conflicting emotions towards him caused her no amount of misery and she knew her family noticed this but was unsure how to deal with it. Their unwavering belief that he was guilty caused a tension between them and this upset her further. Doubts nagged at her but she had no one to express these to and the constant one sided argument from her family confused her more.

She sat under a large oak tree staring at the river when she noticed the brown haired man from two days ago performing his intricate movements. Today he sported gray sweats but was just as handsome as that first day. A part of her wished he would take off his shirt again, daydreaming of his muscular body and having him hold her in his strong arms. Becoming aware of these underpinning thoughts she quickly suppressed them but continued to watch him. He seemed unaware that she was there until his blue eyes met hers delving deep into her soul unsettling her. Realizing she had been caught she blushed profusely and quickly gathered her things and left trying to pretend it was a normal every day occurrence for her to sit under the tree. She wouldn't let anyone tell her what to do, especially an unknown exquisitely handsome man. Of course she had to admit that she always buckled under her family's dictates which further set off her bad mood.

Arriving at her brother's shop she set to work unpacking boxes of the twins products placing them on shelves and arranging the shop to best show off what they had to sell. She became excited about the opening of the store in a few days and all thoughts of the man by the river were lost.



## Chapter 4—Dementors and More

After a quick lunch Harry returned home, showered and changed and decided to interrogate his captives. He learned quite a lot from them after giving each of them veritaserum. All thought of using the restricted potion illegally was pushed aside. He brewed all his own potions now so who would know as long as he didn't kill anyone, and that wasn't what he had planned. He snickered at thinking just what Professor Snape would have to say about his potions skills now. Potions Master indeed! The man was unscrupulous, sure he could brew a decent potion but he didn't understand to the level of creating his own. 'Well you don't either Mr. Smartass' 'Yeah but at least I can admit it so shut up I'm trying to concentrate here!' Harry would give these men a measure of justice that wasn't given him. With the Veritaserum they would have the chance to prove their innocence. Of course, just as he suspected, none of them were innocent and he was disgusted learning about the killings and tortures they inflicted on innocents for their dark Lord. They would receive justice, but not the justice the wizarding world would dish out. No this would be more appropriate. He was elated that he had captured Lucious Malfoy and a special punishment would be instilled upon the man. Although he didn't learn anything new about Voldemorts plans, he learned some interesting personal tidbits that would allow him to elaborate on his own plans a bit.

Lucious of course had the most information to give and Harry learned the location of the secret safe in Fudge's office. He also learned of many other prospective documents the foolish minister had kept that would incriminate the idiot if found. Top priority was set on a plan to get this evidence which would not only prove his innocence, but take out the bastard Fudge and provide a little revenge on his former friends. Killing two birds with one stone would be a change for the better in his opinion, although it was more like 3 or 4 birds that would be shot.

For the next several nights, Harry worked tirelessly in order to set up his chess board. He had prevented two more Death Eater attacks taking into custody 10 more of the dark wizards and handing over 15 to the ministry courtesy of his special portkeys. Instead of leaving the

sight of the attacks, he waited hidden from detection, counting off the minutes it took for the Aurors to arrive.

‘Sluggish lot,’ he thought, ‘incompetents really.’ Although he did have to give them credit to a certain extent, they were good fighters but followed the rules of the ministry to a tea which crippled them every time. Arriving late to the scenes they insured the downfall of the wizarding world if it weren’t for Harry. He studied their procedures and tactics when they arrived and knew they would fall into his plans nicely. They didn’t bother to scan for any residual magical aura and never noticed him silently observing their actions, not that they really could but they shouldn’t they at least try?

The Daily Prophet somehow got a hold of the information about the attacks and the ‘mysterious man in black’ that was all powerful and captured the Death Eaters now held at the ministry. The articles eclipsed those of the escape of the Boy-Who-Lived. Public opinion was split on this man and Harry chuckled when he read the articles describing him as both a man of immense powers but suspected to be dangerous and insane. Harry had to admit, he was by no means ‘All Powerful’ just more powerful than any wizard living today. The Fates deemed it too dangerous for any wizard to have that much power and didn’t want to risk the wrath of the Supreme Being who WAS all powerful. No one seemed to know who this wizard really was or where he came from. Some thought him the new hero of the light, while others clouded by bigotry feared him as a new dark lord because of his powers. It was also hinted at in the articles that Dumbledore was seeking this mysterious man and would do all in his power to insure that he didn’t interfere with the war against Voldemort. Harry laughed aloud at this revelation not noticing the stares he was receiving from the other patrons in the pub. Although they had seen this strange new man regularly for the last week or so eating at the pub, they still didn’t know who he was and were scared to start up any conversation with the strange wizard. One just didn’t do that sort of thing nowadays. He seemed jovial and polite enough but there was something about him that made them keep their distance.

Voldemort on the other hand was raging. Canceling his attack after learning that Harry Potter had escaped Azkaban before he could put his plan in motion fueled his anger to no end. He tortured his

followers for their inadequacies in getting the boy even though they didn't and couldn't have known about his escape any earlier. Voldemort didn't care and cursed them for not finding him.

"He's only a 16 year old boy!" he roared. "A boy who has spent a year in Azkaban with Dementors guarding him. An ignorant boy who hasn't even completed his magical training and no longer has a wand! Surely such a weak stupid boy cannot elude my most powerful followers!"

"My Lord I believe someone is protecting him, sheltering....AHHHHHH!" Bellatrix LeStrange tried to answer before being placed under the cruciatus curse.

"Do not attempt to make excuses Bella! Who would be powerful enough to keep him from me now? I know that idiot Dumbledore doesn't have him! Everyone is searching for him but you, the most powerful feared wizards in the world cannot even locate the boy! I want him within the week!" The Dark Lord screamed his rage once again placing all his followers under the pain curse before spelling out his plan of attack.

Watching through his connection with Voldemort, Harry stifled his laughter at his nemesis's rage and incompetence. Of all things he believed that Dementors would do the job nicely. Hah! Voldemort had another thing coming. Harry decided he would play a little game with Voldemort.

Two days later Harry once again was sitting on the edge of the river, this time wrapped within his robes so no one could see him as he was not wearing any disguise. His plan would be set in motion today. He could feel the Dementors focusing in on him from miles away and bided his time. He felt Ginny's presence and wished she was away from here. Knowing he couldn't approach her as he was and that the Dementors wouldn't have time to harm her he pretended to ignore the red head.

Within 30 minutes the Dementors were swarming on the small village of Hogsmeade. Harry felt them and could hear the fearful screams of the people as they ran for safety. However, the Dementors weren't

after any of them, they had one target in mind, Harry Potter. They were drawn to him, with the promise of the Dark Lord who would give them whatever they desired. So Harry let them come allowing them to sense his magical aura. Unfortunately they were in for a rude awakening.

As the dark figures closed in around Harry he stood quietly, almost uncaring. For a second the Dementors looked as if they were shocked, if one could say such a dark soulless creature could react like that. They almost seemed to be contemplating their actions. As if coming to a decision they tightened their circle around the boy. A bright light wavered slightly and then the Dementors had a new purpose. They immediately vanished and set off after their new prey.

Ginny watched frozen with fear as the Dementors circled around the man by the river. She couldn't move and for an instant she saw black wavy hair whipped by the magical wind created by the Dementors and sparkling emerald eyes. NO! It couldn't be! Harry? A voice in her head told her to remain still and not to interfere. For some reason the voice was calm and comforted her almost pleading with her to obey. She did and was shocked beyond imagination when the man shot his hand into the air and light wavered around him. The Dementors stopped and then disappeared. Ginny fainted.

Harry changed his features and rushed over to where Ginny was laying unconscious on the ground. He had felt her presence earlier and almost wavered in his determination. He could feel the moment of surprise when she had recognized him and he sent her a telepathic message not to interfere. He was slightly relieved to find that she had fainted as soon as the Dementors disappeared, as it would provide a cover for him. Checking to make sure she was alright he lifted her light weight easily and carried her to her brother's shop. He liked the feel of her warm body next to his. Her breaths flickered against his neck creating a tingling sensation that coursed through his body. Her head resting on his shoulder was so close he could smell the light scent of lavender shampoo and drank in her beautiful face. He fought against the urge to kiss those soft lips.

His arrival at the shop was too soon for his liking but he new he couldn't linger. Opening the shop and surprising two identical red-

heads and a bushy haired Hermione he strode into the shop with his precious cargo, steeling himself against the onslaught of emotions they caused.

"Is there somewhere I could lay her down?" he asked to the room in general. He felt slightly unnerved in the presence of his former friends but blanked his mind in order to escape the situation in some semblance of control.

The three stood still for a few minutes at the stranger's entrance. After realizing who the man was carrying, Hermione was the first to react.

"There's a couch in the back room, lay her there. What Happened? Is she okay? Who are you?" They all questioned.

Harry ignored them thinking only of Ginny and strode through a back door behind the sales shelves. Spotting the comfortable couch he gently laid her down on it and cast a warming spell over her.

"Do you have any chocolate?"

"Here give her this." One of the red-heads thrust a bar of chocolate into his hands. Harry looked at Fred or George, he wasn't sure which, suspiciously. The red-head raised an eyebrow at the stranger's scrutiny. Fred thought the stranger looked familiar but he couldn't place it. Harry quickly made sure the chocolate was safe and shook Ginny gently awake.

"Here eat this" he offered.

"Ooh! Where am I?" Her dazed eyes glanced around the shop finally recognizing the place. She looked up into the blue eyes of the man kneeling next to her and started.

"Who are you? Where's Harry?"

"Gin, what are you talking about?" Hermione asked concerned for her friend's state of mind.

"Oy there, mister, who are you and what did you do to our sister?"

Harry sighed then stood up to face the now slightly angered twins. "It was the Dementors, they attacked the town and I found her lying by the river unconscious. After the Dementors left I tried to wake her but couldn't, so I brought her here, yours is the only shop open so I guess I got lucky." Harry felt guilty at his half truths but knew anything else would only create more questions, so he shrugged it off.

"Dementors! Here in Hogsmeade! When?" George nearly shouted.

"Just a few minutes ago, I don't really know what happened but they're gone now."

"Who are you?" Hermione asked again narrowing her eyes in distrust.

"My name is James Roper." He bowed slightly. "I'm newly arrived in Hogsmeade from America." It was better than anything else he could come up with as a cover and would conceal his identity from them and any research she might instigate. Hopefully she didn't notice that his accent wasn't quite right for an American.

Seeming to accept his answer they calmed a bit and turned their attention back to Ginny. She was still eyeing Harry suspiciously and he felt like she could see through his disguise unnerving him again.

"Well I guess I should get going, hope you feel better ma'am." Without waiting for another word he left the shop quickly returning to his home. After clearing his mind he sat down on a couch in his empty living room sipping on a glass of Tartan's Single Malt Scotch, it was a strong but smooth drink and was soon relaxed slipping into sleep.

Voldemort and his followers felt the cold invade the dungeons they were holding their gathering in. Soon the effect of the Dementors could be felt and anticipation coursed through his veins. They had succeeded and it was done quicker than he had dreamed possible. His nemesis was gone! If anyone could describe the Dark Lord in such a way, they would say he was as excited as a 4 year old over a

new toy. The snakelike man rubbed his hands together gleefully and waited for the confirmation that Harry Potter, the bane of his existence was no longer alive.

The Dementors swarmed through the darkened dungeons seeking out their prey. The smell of evil pervaded their senses and they knew he was close. Closer and closer they floated until standing before them was the one they sought. They circled around him with their rattling breaths permeating the silent dungeon. They ignored the questions and orders intent only on taking their prey, earning their reward.

Voldemort noticed the difference in the Dementors as they filled the dank room. His followers were on the ground curled up moaning and crying out as the effects took hold and they relived their worst memories. Voldemort demanded they report on their progress but they didn't listen, instead they tightened their circle around him. Instantly Voldemort became aware that something had changed with the Dementors, they were now after him and his anger flared. Who could turn Dementors, who had the power to control his minions other than himself! They would pay for this outrage. His thoughts were immediately returned to the present as slim boney fingers grabbed at his robes and body trying to force him to the ground so they could administer the kiss. Voldemort fought and using every ounce of magic he possessed he was able to turn the Dementors back to his control. Banishing them he stood up and screamed his vengeance against whoever did this, but all of a sudden he quieted as if trying hard to hear something.

"Hello Tom, how do you like a taste of your own medicine?" a voice sounded in his mind.

"Who are you?"

"You don't know? Oh Tom, I'm severely disappointed, I thought you were smarter than that."

"I will kill you for what you have done, you will feel pain unimaginable...."

“Hah hah hah hah! Tom, do you think you can inflict anything more upon me than I have already been through. No! You will now be at my mercy Tom. You will have visited upon you what you have made the rest of the world suffer. Have fun Tom. I know I will.” And with that the voice vanished from the Dark Lords mind but not before inflicting enough pain to make the evil man fall to his knees grasping at his head. He had no power to fight off the pain; regaining control of the Dementors had made him weak diminishing his powers greatly and now this....this.....POTTER! But how could the boy be that powerful. He would find out. He would kill the boy and make him suffer like none other.

Harry was still laughing at his confrontation with Voldemort. The fear that coursed through the evil gits mind when he realized the Dementors had turned on him was priceless. Harry never knew he could inflict so much fear into the Dark Lord, and have unprecedented access to the mans mind. He reveled in the fact that the Dark Lord was almost ready to wet himself. Satisfied that Voldemorts powers were drained almost to exhaustion, Harry blinded the man with pure white magic, just enough to give the man a taste of the pain he inflicted on others. It was only an iota of the power Harry had at his control, but Voldemort didn't know that and wouldn't know it until Harry was ready to reveal it. It felt good turning the tables for once.

After waking up refreshed he chuckled again, knowing that Voldemort would be waking up with a severe headache if he woke at all anytime soon. Most wizards would be out for at least a week after what he had done to him. Withstanding a blast of pure white magic was not an easy thing to do. He didn't really know if the evil creature slept, but he did know that he wouldn't be using any magic for several days. Opening his trunk he set to work interrogating his new prisoners and brewing the many potions he would need for the next several weeks.

Several days passed and Albus Dumbledore called another emergency meeting of the order to discuss recent findings.

“I have brought you all here tonight to discuss the ongoing attacks of the Death Eaters.”

The room all bowed their head, they knew what was coming.



“It has been confirmed that Potter has indeed rejoined Voldemort and has participated in attacks against muggles. Arthur found Mr. Potter’s emancipation records filed in the Ministry, unfortunately they were already processed so we can not use that against him. Somehow Mr. Potter has also acquired a new wand and has control of the resources contained within both the Potter and Black family vaults. He has also been able to cripple the order financially. I have learned that half the orders funds have been removed. How he was able to obtain the information I am not sure as the goblins are not talking. There is more to the stories in the papers. Although it mentions sightings of Harry Potter by witnesses at the attacks, the only proof we have comes from Death Eaters found on the scenes. It is interesting to note that no deaths were reported during these attacks from either side. The only Death eaters found to question are those that appear at the ministry building with specialized portkeys that we cannot trace a magical aura on. A puzzling situation and the victims do not remember anything of the attack. Quite curious really. It seems that as for now this mysterious man in black is on our side. But I digress. It seems that we must step up our efforts in retrieving Mr. Potter and the ministry has agreed to assist us in our efforts.”

“I can’t believe this is happening,” Mrs. Weasley said in an agonized whisper.

Everyone seemed to agree with this sentiment but it was soon replaced with fierce anger as the thought that they had been betrayed yet again.

“I understand the strain everyone is under but I must ask that you continue in your surveillance and tracking. We must find Harry Potter and remove him from the war. I ask you to refrain from killing him outright as there might be important information we may be able to gain from him that could aid in assisting the light.” Ending the conversation Dumbledore stood up to leave looking older than he had in a long time. The twinkle was gone from his eyes and his shoulders were stooped over almost as if in defeat. With a flash from the fireplace he was gone.

“Well why don’t you all clean up for dinner, I’ll have something ready in a few minutes” Mrs. Weasley stated plainly trying to get her mind off the current affairs.

“I’ll help Molly,” Tonks offered but was waved off by an already distracted Molly.

“Let’s all go in the other room and try to think of other things” suggested Mr. Weasley tiredly. His thoughts however would not be subdued; they were focused on a young black haired, emerald green eyed boy who he had once thought of as one of his own. He was thunderstruck when they heard of Harry’s betrayal and the murder of Percy and he just couldn’t get his hands around why it happened. Harry had always seemed like such a nice polite young man. Sure he seemed to get into a lot of trouble but it wasn’t like he was looking for it, was he? How could they have missed something so important in his character! What had happened to turn the boy to evil? He was distracted by a small glass being shoved into his hand and downed the contents without thinking and sat down in one of the wing chairs by the fire staring absently across the room.

“Have another dad,” Bill offered filling his father’s glass again.

“Thank you son,”

“How could we miss something so important, were there signs that we missed that would have clued us in?” Bill asked echoing his father’s thoughts.

“I don’t know Bill, I have to admit the same questions have been running through my mind” he said.

“What’s there to understand?” Ron stated standing up from the couch and pacing. “He’s a traitor, a bastard who killed my brother! Now he’s taken away all the money that should be ours and even crippled the order by stealing money from them!” To him everything was quite clear—black and white, there was no grey area. “We have to kill him!”

“Ron calm down, he can’t evade everyone forever, time’s running out for him.” Charlie said placing a hand on the shoulder of his irate

younger brother. Ron shrugged it off and sat down with a huff next to Hermione looking around the room.

Ginny sat curled up in the wing chair next to their father completely oblivious to the others, the twins whispered to each other about some kind of plan they were forming while everyone else looked solemn.

"I Hate Him!" Ron shouted and dropped his head into his hands.

"Ron, we understand," Mr. Weasley said, "all of us accepted him as part of the family and then turned on us. I don't understand why, but there's nothing we can do about that now. We have to move on and help in whatever way we can to win this war. Those siding with the Dark Lord will eventually pay dearly for their crimes, we have to have faith and believe that this will end in time." Little did he know how prophetic his words were.

"I hope your right dad, but it's hard to think about him being free to run around causing more death and pain. Percy's dead, his life cut short. He had a promising career and now he.....That bastard deserves so much more than the Dementors kiss that the minister has just recently authorized. I want him in pain for the rest of his life after what he has done to our family," said Charlie vehemently.

"I agree Charlie, but we have to concentrate on finding him, and I agree with Dumbledore that he might be more useful to us alive than dead at this point."

"I can't believe you Hermione!"

"Ron, don't you see, Potter is probably one of the few supporters who may have intimate knowledge of Voldemorts plans. Professor Snape has already stated that he only tells his goons right before an attack what they are suppose to do. Maybe Potter has been helping plan these attacks so maybe he knows more than the others. That would explain why Snape doesn't know about the attacks and hasn't seen Potter at Death Eater meetings. He seems to have been involved with all of the attacks since his escape. At least that's what the captured Death Eaters have said. It makes sense."

“Yeah I guess your right” Ron conceded grudgingly.

Talk continued until they were called to dinner. No one noticed that there was one red headed member and a lone werewolf who did not partake in their crucifixion of the Boy-Who-Lived and barely ate what was on their plate. The two sat in silence waging an internal verbal war trying to figure out the truth that lay hidden to so many. Before desert was passed around Remus suddenly got up from the table and left. Although noticed, no one commented on his departure. Remus Lupin swore to himself he would find Harry before the others and would find out what was going on.

Meanwhile Harry was revising his plans to incorporate Voldemorts recent plot to further the belief of Harry's betrayal of the light. Maintaining one step ahead of all his enemies was a tricky business but he was finding that it was easy to manipulate their actions to further his plans. It was now mid August and Harry was going to step up the tempo a little to confuse the world. Although the Death Eaters thought they had the advantage they were not able to kill anyone during their attacks let alone torture them. Harry was always there to stop them and knew this infuriated Voldemort. Planting Death Eaters with false stories at the scene was only of small concern to Harry as they would ultimately serve to ruin Voldemorts plans shortly. It was now time for Lucious to have a little payback.

Stunning Lucious in his cell before he entered, Harry set to work changing the man's appearance. Tonight would be the night Harry Potter would fall into the hands of the ministry. Picking up the unconscious man Harry apparated to the sight of tonight's Death Eater attack and lay the man on the ground in front of the house. He quickly set up wards to protect the house and its inhabitants and waited invisible until the Death Eaters showed their faces, not literally speaking of course, since they wore those stupid masks. Harry never did understand why they hid their faces; if they were the most powerful wizards and instilled fear in others why hide their face? It actually was quite a dichotomy.

Snapping his thoughts back to the present he heard them approach. Oh this was going to be fun, from the magical auras he could see, it

looked like 10 Death Eaters would be here tonight. Where Voldemort kept find

Although Lucius didn't have his wand on him Harry knew the man could still apparate and he was counting on him to do just that. Wouldn't he be surprised to find out that no matter where he tried to go he would end up in only one place! When the Death Eaters came into view and were only a few meters from the form of Lucius he woke the man up.

Lucius stood groggily wondering where he was. Upon seeing his brethren approaching he tried to shout at them, but his voice would not respond. He tried waving to get their attention and was appalled when one of them tried to stun him. He reached for his wand and tried to curse when he couldn't find it. He was able to dodge the stunner and tried to shout again in anger, but again nothing would leave his mouth. Soon the curses were flying and without a wand he knew he was dead. Seeing no other option Lucius apparated from the place hoping to return to his master and figure out what was going on.

The Death Eaters saw a body lying on the ground and as they came closer, the man stood as if waking from a deep sleep. It was Harry Potter! Their master would be pleased for such a prize and they would be rewarded handsomely. One of the Death Eaters, quicker than the others on his assumption of his master's reaction, stepped forward and shot a stunner at the boy. The boy jumped out of the way but not soon enough as the night was lit with a variety of curses when his brethren also figured out the importance of the boy before them. Too late they realized that the boy had disappeared, and in his place stood the black robed mysterious man they had all learned to be afraid of. No one ever returned from a mission where he intervened. No one except those that were turned over to the ministry that is. Feeling lost the men tried to leave as fear overrode all other senses but they found they couldn't apparate and their portkeys didn't work. The man quickly dispatched the 10 Death Eaters, cleaned up the damage caused by their curses, stored all his new captives appropriately and apparated to watch the fun. Tonight he could go without watching the incompetence of the Ministry Aurors.

Lucious Malfoy appeared in the middle of Diagon Alley right in front of Gringotts Wizarding Bank. This was not where he was trying to go and immediately apparated again. He wound up only a few feet away from where he was before. After two more attempts he was resigned to the fact that he couldn't apparate out, he would have to find another way out of the alley. However, his attempts at apparition had alerted a few Aurors in the vicinity on guard duty to his appearance. They kept him in sight while quietly alerting the other Aurors and Order members within the alley that Harry Potter was walking nonchalantly down the street.

Lucious walked towards the Leaky Cauldron completely unaware of the group forming behind him and following at a discreet distance. Before he could get to the Leaky Cauldron he was stopped as a group of Aurors stepped out in front of him.

"Harry Potter, you are under arrest for the murder and torture of....."

Without looking around to see who they were addressing, Lucious once again tried to apparate but only wound up right in front of Gringotts again. This wasn't the best situation for him to be in. With so many Aurors crowding Diagon Alley it would be hard for him to escape detection. He was furious when one of the Aurors tried to tackle him and he immediately tried to take the man out with his fists. Screaming filled his mind but his vocal cords just wouldn't respond. More Aurors arrived to assist and tried to take him out, he fought viciously for several minutes and sported several bruises to his face and body before someone took him out with a stunning curse. Lucious Malfoy fell into blackness not knowing what was happening.

Harry watching in the shadows fought hard to keep his laughter in check. 'you know old boy I do believe your having too much fun with this!' an inner voice stated.

'Well considering I haven't been allowed any freedoms or happiness for oh what.... My entire life, consider this making up for all those times.'

'Looks like you'll be having more than enough fun in the next year to make up for the past.'

'Nothing would be able to make up for the past'

'oh you're spoiling it, getting all serious on us'

'oh shut up, I really don't need voices in my head distracting me, I'll start thinking I've gone crazy again.'

'Been there, done that, we won't return to it, besides what would you do without us'

'Sssh, let's just go see what happens at the ministry.'

After the Aurors had subdued Lucious they apparated away with their new prisoner and Harry followed. He watched as they lead him down to a row of white washed cells that were housing the Death Eaters that Harry had sent their way. Harry appreciated the fact that the death eaters were not being taken to Azkaban as it wasn't really safe and was impressed at the spell work done to keep the prisoners from escaping. Following unseen and undetected he watched as they threw Lucious into an empty cell and locked him in. Through the one way glass Harry could see the flushed face, his own face, but Lucious still hadn't caught on. Lucious walked up to the glass and was pounding on it with his fists, his mouth was moving but no sound came out. Harry smile at this and settled in for the show to start.

Lucious stepped back from the glass and started to look around at his new surroundings. He saw a reflection in what he knew to be a one way glass containment wall and was startled to see Harry Potter staring back at him. He took a step forward looking into the glass thinking it a trick but the reflection mirrored his movements. Understanding dawned on him and he raged around the room, blood rushing to his face in anger he searched dementedly for anything to destroy or throw. The only thing in this room was a small cot which he proceeded to rip to shreds with his bare hands still shouting soundlessly. When the bed lay in ruins his anger still had not subsided and he began kicking at the remains and trying to shred them further.

Harry watched laughing loudly at the antics of Lucious Malfoy. Thankful for the silencing charm he placed around himself because he couldn't stop. Tears of mirth were running down his face unchecked and his sides ached from laughing so hard. Pleased to see his stunt had worked so well he anxiously awaited the next phase, and sure enough he saw them walking towards him. It was the entire Weasley clan minus Ginny, Albus Dumbledore, Kingsley Shacklebolt, Tonks, the Minister of Magic himself and a few other unknown aurors. Harry assumed the extra aurors were part of the minister's own personal body guard and made a mental note to himself about it.

They reached the glass of the cell containing 'himself' and waited for their reactions. Sucking in breaths to slow his laughter and relieve the pain in his side while drying his face and eyes he silently scanned their thoughts. They stood watching the man inside ranting and raving trying to destroy his cell with a look of terror and disbelief on their faces. Surely this was enough to prove the boy was insane and a follower of the Dark Lord. Who else would act in such a manner upon being captured? Harry watched as his old headmasters shoulders slumped and he nodded almost imperceptibly to Kingsley. Kingsley acknowledged the order and stepped into the cell with wand raised. Lucious, or rather Harry Potter, stopped dead in his tracks staring at the man entering his cell, then leapt at the man trying to strangle him. Tonks stepped from behind Kingsley and stunned Harry/Lucious before he got to within a foot of Kingsley. They left Harry slumped unconscious on the floor and exited the cell. Before leaving though the real Harry had caught the smug looks on the faces of those present and the pain tore at his heart. He left for home and drowned his sorrow in his now favorite past time, drinking.

"He was crazy I tell you. Geez if you saw the look in his eyes you would believe me!"

"Ron it couldn't be that bad."

"Gin you didn't see him, by the time we got there he had already shredded the cot in his room, there was nothing left! When Kingsley went in, he tried to kill him with his bare hands! It was scary!"

"Ron, you know you have a tendency to over exaggerate..."



"Hermione you weren't there! Don't tell me what I saw! Ask George or Fred, they'll back me up, Bill and Charlie were there too!"

"Yeah it was pretty frightful" Fred interjected.

"Never seen him like that before,"

"At least not in person,"

"Well did he answer any questions? And what was he doing walking alone in Diagon Alley as if nothing was up?" Ginny asked trying to change the subject.

"I don't know why he was there. But he must have gone mental in Azkaban! It sure looked it at the Ministry. After he tried to attack Kingsley, Tonks stunned him and they just left him there. I heard from Bill that they have to keep him sedated because he goes wild when he's awake. Tries to attack anyone that comes in." Ron said.

"Yeah at least they're using stunners which are somewhat painful instead of giving him sleeping potions and such," Fred added.

"Fred that's horrible!"

"Gin he deserves everything he gets" George retaliated.

"Gin you know their right, plus I don't think sleeping potions would last long, they're very addictive and have a tendency for the user to grow immunity towards them if used too long." Hermione stated.

"God I can't believe what I'm hearing from you people. Do I even know you anymore?"

"Gin come on, what's up with you?"

"You are what's up with me, my stupid idiotic bothers and girlfriend. Hermione I would have thought at least you would have looked into things. You go around spouting your knowledge like a freaking encyclopedia but the one time when you could have used that

overfilled brain of yours it fails you. Tell me one thing, because I can't understand it, why was Percy at Harry's house the night he died. What reason would he have for being there, cause I can't figure it out!" With that she stormed out of the Three Broomsticks leaving four very bewildered looking teens.

Harry sitting in the booth next to them, as had been his custom whenever they were there, heard the entire conversation. He felt a spark of hope light within the depths of his soul and without drawing attention to himself paid his bill and followed Ginny out of the pub. She was moving fast down the street and Harry quickened his pace to try to catch her up, all the while trying to figure out how to start a conversation with her. Sitting down beneath her favorite tree she drew her knees up to her chest and let the tears fall.

"Excuse me Miss..."

"Ginny, just call me Ginny" she answered in a far away voice not realizing who was talking to her.

"Ginny, may I join you?"

"Whatever" Ginny replied waving her hand in the air, still lost somewhere else.

"If I'm not being too forward, can I ask why you are crying?"

"Oh, am I, well sorry" she said wiping her eyes with her sleeve then finally turning to the person besides her, "you're that man that well, um, I see, that um"

"James Roper"

"Sorry James, I just have a lot on my mind lately"

"Care to talk about it?" Harry asked hoping she would.

"Well it is kind of personal," she replied eyeing him up and down.

"I understand," Harry said in defeat, and then took a leap of faith, "This wouldn't have to do with a certain Harry Potter would it?"

"How do you know about him? Boy you're a nosy git"

"Wow, sorry, guess I hit a nerve there didn't I" Harry said raising his hands in front of him in mock defense. Ginny giggled and Harry smiled at the sound. He liked her laugh; it made him feel light as if all the cares of the world were being washed away. He stared into her eyes and saw her returning it, he could get lost in those expressive brown eyes with the sun setting off golden sparks in them.

"Well yeah, we used to be friends, and I just don't know.....You of course heard he escaped. Everyone says he's dangerous and has been involved with the Death Eater attacks and others believe it couldn't possibly be him because he hasn't even completed school yet. It all just sounds so wrong, I can't place it. And then he shows up walking nonchalantly down Diagon Alley where he knows he would be captured! What do you think?"

"Well I don't rightly know, I don't have all the facts yet, care to fill me in?"

"It's a really long story, and it's getting late, I'm sure you have better things to do than hang around a mope like me listening to all this."

"Not really, but if you would rather not talk about it, maybe some other time?" Harry stood up offering his hand to help her up. She looked up at him ashamed about how she felt about this strange handsome man, she felt like she was cheating on Harry. 'You were never dating you know. He never said he liked you like that at school,' and inner voice challenged. Accepting his hand she straightened out her outfit and entwined her arm in the one he offered.

"How about we go to the Three Broomsticks for a Butterbeer? I'd really like to spend some more time with you."

"Really James, you barely know me" she said with a small blush.

"Exactly my point."

“Well okay, I guess it couldn’t hurt.”

Harry was in heaven; he was talking with Ginny and getting to know her. With her arm intertwined in his the world felt perfect and he didn’t want it to end. They made small talk on their way back to the pub and she was laughing creating that odd reaction within him. The three Weasley’s and Hermione were still at the same booth and Ginny didn’t want to join them so they talked and laughed with Madame Rosmerta drinking their Butterbeers until Harry caught his reflection in the mirror. For some reason a lead weight sank to the pit of his stomach and all his enjoyment of being with Ginny faded. He looked at her face, flushed pink from laughter and her warm brown eyes and knew that she didn’t see him as Harry but as a different man, James Roper. Would she be able to laugh the same with the real Harry? Probably not and his mood grew darker.

Ginny noticed the mood change in her new acquaintance and she grew thoughtful. “Is there something wrong James?”

James? Who’s that? Oh shit, she’s talking to me. “Ah nothing, I was just remembering something I had to do tonight that’s all. Work you know.” He said trying to find an excuse.

“I take it you don’t really like your job?” Ginny probed.

Harry looked up searching her face for any sign of recognition, the question seemed to have more than one meaning and he wasn’t sure. “Not really” was all he said.

“Well I’m sure there are other jobs out there for you. You just have to find the right one.” She said as if was an easy thing to do.

“I’m ah, sort of committed to finish this before I can.. um....change positions.” He said trying to turn the conversation.

“Well then finish it quickly and move on. You can’t wait forever you know.”

Geez did she really know what she was implying? Nope, how could she, she didn't even know who she was really talking to. To her, he was just a normal guy with a normal boring job that he didn't like. It was everything he had ever wanted but it didn't feel right.

"Well I guess I should be going then. May I see you again some time?" He spat out before thinking about what he was asking and what it would put him through.

"Sure, I don't see why not. I work at my brother's store here over the holidays for extra spending money so you can get in touch with me there. Thanks James for everything." She said as she got up from her seat and rejoined the others.

Harry watched her go with a saddened heart and left the pub once she was in deep conversation with her friend and family.

When Harry arrived home the alarms were screaming wildly. He quickly searched the house and found none other than Remus Lupin poking around what looked to him a decrepit rotting shack. Silencing the alarms he watched as Remus moved from room to room searching for something. Harry guessed correctly what his goal was.

"Harry? Are you here?" Remus whispered throughout the house. "Harry please, I must talk to you, I know you were innocent! Please show yourself if you're here." The man walked through several other rooms searching and when he didn't find anything returned to the living room and sank to the floor holding his head in his hands. His shoulders were shaking and Harry knew the man was crying, his heart went out to him and a small piece of his heart fell into place. Without revealing himself or his home he approached Remus and spoke.

"Why are you here Remus?"

The man jumped at the sound of the voice and looked wildly around trying to discern the source of the voice.

"Remus?"

“Harry? Is that you?”

“Why are you here Remus?” Harry asked again not wanting to reveal himself just yet.

“Harry I came to find you, before the others. They think you’re involved with Voldemort, I just can’t believe that! Just like I can’t believe you did those things a year ago. I’m so sorry I wasn’t there Harry, I failed you, I....I....” the man collapsed crying again.

Harry couldn’t take anymore and decided to show himself to Remus. “I know Remus; I know you were the only one that believed in me.” He said kneeling down next to the last marauder, the last of his father’s best friends.

“Harry?” Remus looked up into the brilliant emerald eyes and unruly black hair, disbelieving this could be real.

“Yes Moony it’s really me.” Harry wasn’t prepared when the man jumped and wrapped him into a tight hug.

“Oh God Harry, you’re alive, I only hoped, thank Merlin I found you, what are you doing here? They’re looking for you, you’re not safe here Harry, you need to go now...”

“Moony calm down please..” Harry spoke disengaging the man’s strong grip around his neck. “Please, I’m safer than you can imagine, but you’re right that we can’t be out in the open like this. If you would come with me, I’ll show you, but you have to promise not to tell anyone, actually if you don’t want to stay I might have to get your permission to alter your memory after this.”

“What?”

“Do you trust me?”

“Of course Harry but what are you going on about?”

“Do you agree to have me alter you memory when you leave here?”

"Of course Harry, but I won't be telling anyone where you are, there's no one powerful enough to break into a werewolf's mind. In fact I just might have to impose myself upon you to make sure your safe."

Harry laughed at this and Remus smiled. Helping Remus up off their positions on the floor Harry revealed the password that would allow Remus to see his true home.

"My God Harry, look at this place! Is this....the.... Shrieking Shack?"

"Yes Moony it is. As you can see I've made a few alterations to the place. Do you like it?"

"Yes Harry but how?"

"Well that's a long story. Are you hungry? How about I show you around the place and then I can make dinner while we talk?"

"Lead on!" Remus said.

The short tour impressed Remus greatly and he added a few tips on certain decorations to lighten the place up a little before they moved to the kitchen to prepare dinner. Harry discovered that Remus actually knew his way around the kitchen almost as good as himself, but stated that he would never admit it to anyone. They chatted lightly about different topics until they were done with dinner and Harry suggested they retire to the living room for the serious talk. Pouring them both a glass of Firewhiskey and placing the bottle on the coffee table, he motioned for Remus to take a seat. Harry downed his glass and poured another much to the surprise of Remus, but he didn't say anything. Pacing in front of the fire Harry began his tale. By the end of it he was slouched in one of the wing chairs downing his fifth glass of Firewhiskey.

"So that's it. Pretty disturbing I realize, but there's not much else to tell. You understand now why I have to alter your memory when you leave. I'm pretty sure Dumbledork suspects something and I can't have him getting any information from you. I have plans in motion that I can't afford to be interrupted at this point."

“Harry... I....” Remus gulped and finished off the Firewhiskey he’d been nursing through the tale. “I never knew, I..”

“It’s alright Moony, it is pretty unbelievable even to me and I’ve lived through it.” Harry chuckled a little, earning a nervous glance from his old professor.

“Harry, I don’t know what you would say to this, but I don’t think I can go back to them. Even with a memory charm in place I don’t agree with what they are doing and eventually they would have me holed up just like they did with Sirius. I don’t want to hinder you in any way, but .....

“Remus, do you want to stay with me?” Harry asked incredulously. It was more than he had hoped for really. He never even considered it before and now here Remus was laying it out on the line for him. Dare he accept? Why not? Gotta start somewhere and he really was lonely in this house by himself.

“If you don’t mind I’d like that very much Harry.” Remus barely whispered.

“Of course I don’t mind Moony!” Harry said springing out of his seat with renewed energy. “It’s perfect, I don’t expect you to help me of course, some of the things I’m doing, well ..could... well really are considered illegal by the ministry and I don’t want you to get into trouble.”

“Harry, trouble is what a marauder does! Of course I’ll help you, you haven’t really been given it before, and from what you’ve told me you’re making more headway in this war than anyone else. What do you say we call it a night and continue this tomorrow?”

“Sounds good to me. Pick whatever room you want Moony; we’ll get you set up in the morning. G’night” Harry yawned and they both turned in for the night, feeling like a weight had been lifted from their shoulders.



## Chapter 5--Pain

In the morning Harry made Remus a large breakfast and showed him his trunk.

"Harry, I don't know what to say! You have to have about 20 Death Eaters in here!"

"Actually there are 30 Moony, I think I'll have to expand the compartment sizes, they're filling pretty fast."

"How many compartments Harry?"

"Well right now I'm only using two for the holding cells."

"Why don't you turn them over to the ministry?" He said leading the way out of the trunk.

"Oh come on Moony, do you honestly believe they'll keep them locked up? I've already recaptured 5 that were turned over to the ministry last week! I've seen the cells they created at the ministry and they seem adequate, but they don't have enough. Eventually they'll have to find a new prison or find another way to hold Azkaban without the Dementors."

"You do have a point there, have any ideas on Azkaban?"

Harry raised an eyebrow in response.

"Oh sorry, Harry didn't mean it like that."

"I know Moony; it's just still sore you know?"

"Well let's talk about something else. What are we going to do today?"

"Well I thought a trip to Diagon Alley and then to Muggle London would be nice, what do you think?"

“Harry, you’re not safe out of this house! Everyone is looking for you, hell the ministry has even notified the muggle government to start looking for you, much like they did with Sirius!”

“Ah, Moony you’re forgetting something, watch and learn.” A smile split his face as he morphed his features turning his hair brown and eyes blue and making his scar disappear. “Meet James Roper Moony, pleased to meet ya.”

Chuckling Remus had to agree his disguise was pretty impressive. “What about your magical signature?”

“Ministry can’t detect it, actually I don’t think anyone can.” Harry shrugged. “Voldemort’s the only one that came close sending those Dementors after me, I don’t think he enjoyed me turning them around on him, but oh well. Besides, how do you think I’ve been catching all the death munchers?”

“Oh, yeah, the mysterious man in black.” He said in a mock shivery voice.

It was Harry’s turn to laugh and he stood up getting ready to go. “Ready? Meet you at the Leaky Cauldron.”

“Leaky Cauldron it is.”

Snape was in a hurry, no one had ever in the history of Hogwarts seen the man move so swiftly as if his very life depended on it. Only pausing a second at the stone gargoyles that guarded the entrance to the headmaster’s office he raced up the moving spiral staircase and burst through the door.

“Headmaster, I must speak with you now!” Snape shouted breathlessly not caring who else was in the room.

Albus Dumbledore sat behind his desk calmly, his only response to the outburst was placing his elbows upon his desk and steepling his hands together in contemplation. He looked at his potions master over the rim of his spectacles and then to his guest.

“Unless there is something else you require of me minister, I do believe my potions master has an emergency that needs to be discussed.”

Cornelius Fudge was aware that he had been dismissed and felt his pride ruffled but he grabbed his green bowler hat, nodded and stepped into the fireplace and was gone.

“Now Severus, how may I help you?” Dumbledore asked politely.

“It’s Harry, he.....was.....innocent!” Snape blurted out.

Dumbledore sprang out of his chair exhibiting an energy he hadn’t done for a long while, resting his hands on his desk and leaning forward.

“What?” was all the old man could get out.

Harry felt a twinge in his scar and knew Voldemort was up to something, but he didn’t have time now. He was in the middle of muggle London at an outdoor café enjoying a nice lunch with Remus. Their conversation was light and Harry didn’t want to end it, he focused his occlumency trying to block it out but it was persistent this time. Remus seemed to have noticed because he immediately stopped talking and looked at him with worry.

“Harry, are you alright,” he whispered leaning closer.

“Moony I have to use the loo, I might be awhile. No it’s not like that, I have to find out what he’s up to, and it’s too persistent this time.”

“You don’t think he’s trying to show you something that’s....”

“He can’t do that to me anymore, although he has tried. It’s a nice little advantage I have over him now, especially when he believes he has succeeded. Stay here we’ll finish when I return.” Not waiting for an answer Harry set off for the restaurants loo and settled himself in a booth where he wouldn’t be disturbed.

After 30 minutes Harry returned somber faced and sat down. He secured the information from Voldemorts latest meeting for later contemplation and returned to eating with Remus.

“What was it about?” Remus asked quietly continuing to eat.

“Not now, we’ll talk later, but I’m afraid we’re going to have a busy night. For now let’s just eat and finish our shopping okay?” he asked suppressing his sigh.

“Headmaster, why are we all here?”

“I will explain in good time Minerva, but I see we have yet to welcome a few more individuals. Please everyone take a seat while we wait. Molly has been good enough to provide such delicious fare; I couldn’t let it go to waste.” Dumbledore replied and sank his teeth into one of Molly Weasley’s meat tarts.

Realizing Dumbledore would not say anything else until the mysterious visitors arrived, they joined in partaking of the feast Molly had laid out before them. Whispered conversations filled the room until the kitchen door opened and the youngest Weasley’s and Hermione Granger stepped into the room, albeit shyly.

“Ah, here we are then, please take a seat. Are you hungry?” All three heads nodded in the negative and Albus waved them into the room to find a seat. No one said anything but all eyes were focused on Mrs. Weasley, she had never allowed the ‘children’ to sit in on order meetings before and they were all taken aback by this change in tactics.

Molly for her part kept silent already having gone through all her arguments with Albus before. She had no idea what the meeting was about, and still disapproved of having them sit in, but Albus was adamant they be present. With her lips pursed in disapproval she sat perched on the edge of her chair waiting to get on with the meeting.

“Where’s Remus?” Tonks asked looking around at those present.

“Ah that will be explained shortly,” Albus said lowering his head. “Snape if you would please?” Snape stood from his seat at the table and began explaining to the others.

“The Dark Lord has brought it to the attention of the inner circle that Harry Potter has been captured and is being held in one of the Ministry of Magic’s detainment cells.”

“Well Hell,” said Mad-eye Moody, “Everyone knows that by now!”

“If you would let me finish” Snape growled out. Then nodding he continued, “It seems that Voldemort suspects the boy to be weak, so weak he will be an easy target. He is planning an attack and is gloating about the wizarding world allowing their ‘saviour’ to be taken out so easily.”

“I say good riddance,” Ron shouted standing up. He looked around the room and several others nodded their agreement. Snape scowled at the idiotic red head.

“You do not understand you idiot,” Snape ground out between clenched teeth. “The boy was innocent! Lucious and Draco Malfoy were rewarded for their roles in bringing down Potter.”

“Yeah right, like Harry was innocent” Ron continued looking for support, but winced when he found none.

“I’m afraid there is more to tell, it also seems as though both Lucious and Draco Malfoy have gone missing from what Snape reported earlier. A search has been conducted and there has been no sign of either of them for the last week. Their accounts have not been accessed and all other known properties are under surveillance. It’s seems as though Remus Lupin has also disappeared, to where we do not know.”

“You don’t think he went looking for Harry do you?” asked a frightened Ginny.

“Yes I do believe he has Miss Weasley. I hope for his safe return.”

“But what about Harry? What do we do now?” It was Tonks turn to shout.

“I am not sure. We do not have any proof of his innocence as of yet. It could be a ploy by Voldemort to lead us into a trap. Severus’ role may be compromise but we do not have enough information to go on. Even if he were to be proven that Potter is innocent I do not think he would be able to function in society, and then there are the accounts that he has been assisting the Death Eaters in attacks.” Dumbledore said with a heavy heart.

“What is that suppose to mean?” Mad-eye asked scrutinizing his old friend with both eyes.

“That is just it. His reaction upon being recaptured has shown that he is still dangerous and a psychological analysis has been done revealing him to be consumed by rage and incapable of social interaction.”

“Well who wouldn’t be after what we did to him.” Bill spoke quietly.

“Professor?”

“Yes Miss Granger,”

“Well, Ron told me they had to keep sedating him because he was too violent with um...visitors.”

“Yes that is true Miss Granger,”

“Well, um...if he is too violent for visitors, how did they perform the psychological analysis on him?”

“Through observation Miss Granger.”

“Oh,.....well...um....in the muggle world they have to well, conduct a more thorough analysis of someone before they are declared...in.....I mean unfit.”

"I wish we had that luxury Miss Granger," he sighed, "but as it is, no one can get close to him." Dumbledore stated drooping his shoulders.

"Can we see him?" Ginny nearly squeaked out.

"I do not believe that to be a good idea Miss Weasley."

"But,"

"No, there are more pressing matters at hand, if Mr. Potter is innocent, we need to find a safe place for Mr. Potter before Voldemort can get to him."

"So do you like my new look?"

"Moony anything looks better than what you were wearing before." Harry laughed as they returned home and started putting their new purchases away.

"Oh that hurts cub!"

"Okay, seriously, yes, you look much better. You seem to look, I don't know, younger, more alive."

"Well that's something coming from you!" said Remus ruffling Harry's messy black hair.

"Ugh, lay off the hair would you?"

"Cub give it up, your dad could never do anything with it I doubt you can."

"I know, but it doesn't mean I have to like it." Harry said with a grin then sank onto Remus' bed.

"What is it Harry?"

"Well, remember lunch today?"

"Yeah. Oh you mean your trip to the loo?"

"Yeah," he said with a chuckle. "Well Voldemort is planning to attack the ministry tonight to get, well me. I can't let them take me."

"You're confusing me Harry."

"Okay well, I sort of transfigured Lucious Malfoy to look like me to take some of the heat off of the real me. He can't talk or anything and is being held in the Ministry right now. I have plans for him for later so I can't really let Voldemort have him but I can't take him out of there either. So you see my dilemma?"

"I don't get it Harry, why does Voldemort want you so badly?"

"You don't know about the prophecy, do you?" Harry stated blandly running a hand through his hair.

"What prophecy?"

"Guess another tidbit of information Dumbledore has kept from people. You see...." and Harry proceeded to tell Remus about the prophecy that predicted that Harry either had to kill or be killed by Voldemort.

"Geez Harry." Remus was flabbergasted. "This is almost too much."

"I know, but it gets better. Voldemort, at his little death muncher reunion today told them that I was innocent and that Luscious and Draco had a part in framing me. To bad that wasn't recorded somewhere like that damn prophecy huh?"

Remus had to chuckle a little at Harry's attempt at humor. "We'll just have to find another way. I heard that Fudge keeps private documents hidden. I was hoping that somehow we could get our hands on those, and maybe it may be what we need to clear you."

"I already know about the documents I need for that. I also know where they're hidden, but I have to time it right and having them break me out of the ministry tonight won't help."



“What about the order?” Remus said sitting up straight in his chair as if a light bulb had just been turned on in his head.

“Well there is that I suppose,” Harry stood up and paced in front of the window thinking hard. “Snape was there, do you think we can trust that he would go running to Dumbledore with this information?”

“I think so Harry, however much you or I dislike him, he has never failed the order in doing the right thing. They may even think it a ploy by Voldemort. For a while Snape has suspected that his position is on shaky grounds.”

Harry grimaced at the comment. ‘Yeah like when it came to Sirius and me?’

‘Oh stop wallowing in self pity, get over it already.’

‘Shut up!’

‘Hey I thought you had this all worked out before!’

‘Coming to terms with what happened in another realm is a lot different than facing those who did it to you in the flesh.’

‘We getting a little emotional now?’

‘Shut up!’

‘Ooh we’re so scared of big bad nasty Harry!’

“I SAID SHUT UP!”

“What?”

“Oh sorry Remus, having a debate with myself, guess I am a little crazy after all.” Harry watched as Remus stood up from his chair, worry written all over his face.

Oh please don’t let it be true, Remus thought to himself. Sirius seemed almost normal too when he got out of Azkaban, until Remus

had caught him talking to himself just like Harry seemed to be doing now. Except with Sirius he had been in there for 12 years, much longer than the one year Harry had spent. But Sirius had Padfoot to protect himself against the Dementors for all that time, what did Harry have? Harry was no animagus when he started his sentence and his memories were a lot worse than Sirius'. Calm down Remus, he breathed, remember what Harry told you about the alternate realm. Maybe Harry is still hearing people from that realm?

"Harry?"

"Oh sorry, bad joke! I guess it's more like when you're weighing the good and bad sides of things to yourself, you know?" Harry felt bad for the white lie he was telling but it was better than Remus believing that he was crazy. He knew he had scared the werewolf by saying that and he didn't want to lose him and be alone again.

"Okay Harry, I guess I can understand that."

"So I guess I should get going if I want to make sure I'm not taken to Voldemort." Harry said looking at his watch. "Here take this." He flicked one of his un-activated button portkeys to Remus who caught it deftly and looked up questioning it. "It's one of my portkeys, it has a few other features as well, but I figured I could use it as a signal to you if for any reason I needed your help?"

"Sure Harry, and I won't even ask how you managed it."

Harry laughed and smiled at Remus. "It will glow red if I need help and send a little shock to you. I can also make it turn green if everything is going fine. It will work no matter where I am. It also has an emergency portkey to St Mungos, all you do is tap it with your wand and say 'Mungos', the other specialty is how I've been transporting the Death Eaters to the Ministry since I got out."

"Harry you're a genius!"

"I try, Well, I'll see you soon Moony." And Harry vanished.

"Be careful Harry." Remus prayed.

Once again concealed from everyone Harry arrived at the Ministry just in time to see Kingsley Shacklebolt, Tonks, and Moody stun Harry in his cell, place an invisibility cloak over him and quickly levitate him out. 'Wow, if it's that easy no wonder Voldemort's winning!'

'Sssh! Don't start again!'

The three aurors walked in a small triangular formation as if nothing was amiss straight to the Ministry fireplaces and immediately flooded away. Harry's small smirk split into a full grin when he realized where they had to be taking him. Oh they had a lot in store for awhile and wished he could watch the fireworks. 'Why not? I bet old Voldemorts gonna have a fit when his Death Eaters turn up empty handed tonight!'

'Let's go!'

'To apparate or not to apparate, then how?'

'Ooh I know, just pop in and show them two of us.'

'Nah, to melodramatic.'

'It would be too boring to apparate in invisible, how about....'

'I got it!'

Harry still invisible stepped into the fireplace and stated his destination and with a flash of green fire he was gone.

The Kitchen in Grimmauld place was in an uproar when he arrived, fussing over the unconscious form of himself lying on the table. 'Should've let them see what I really looked like before I got out, that would show them' Harry was angered by the fawning his former family and friends were making over the unconscious form of himself. They barely noted his entrance until Moody roared to life scanning the room with his magical eye and pointing his wand all over the place. Tonks and Kingsley followed suit alarmed at Moody's actions.

“Someone just flooded in” Moody said in hushed tones.

“Where is he?”

“I didn’t see anyone.” Mrs. Weasley stated hands on hips as if they were playing some prank.

“Ssh Molly, the fire flared green, someone’s here.”

“Oh for heavens sake, we need to get Harry here up to bed.”

“No, he goes in the basement!”

“What? That’s outrageous! I will not hear of it!” Molly stomped her foot down.

Harry’s angered roar at the hypocrisy of those before him. One minute so eager to condemn him for something he didn’t do and now acting as if nothing had ever happened and he was the love of their life again. It was a difficult struggle for him to stay where he was and concealed from them. Time for some righteous anger, or at least a semblance of it.

Harry waved his hand and Lucius woke up. Upon seeing the detested faces of the Weasleys he sprang to his feet swinging. At least he and Lucius agreed on something. If it was really him instead of Lucius, he had to admit he would have reacted very similarly.

The action before him was surreal, Ron took a blow to his face successfully breaking his nose, blood flowed freely and he tried to stop it with his hand while Hermione helped him up from the ground pulling on his other arm. Fred and George were successfully dancing around dodging the flailing arms swinging out at them. Bill stepped in to restrain the false Harry but received a swift uppercut to his jaw sending him flying backwards into Charlie and sending them both to the ground. Kingsley had gotten behind Harry and was trying to wrap his arms around him but received an elbow to the groin for his troubles and doubled over falling to the ground curling up into a tight knot. Mrs. Weasley and Ginny were hugging each other trying to stay

as far out of reach of the battle as they could. They were almost right beneath invisible Harry's perch cowering against the wall. Tonks got off a stunner but Lucious moved just in time and it hit Mr. Weasley in the chest. Moody who had been trying to aim at the wild boy but afraid of hitting someone else finally had a clear shot and sent a stunner that knocked Harry out.

Mrs. Weasley, Moody and Tonks quickly rushed forward to tend to the injuries received and enervated Mr. Weasley. Moody stepped up beside the unconscious body of Harry/Lucious and bound him tightly. Before anyone could make a move Moody had the cellar door open and Harry/Lucious levitating and proceeded down the dimly lit stairs with Tonks, Bill and Charlie following behind nursing their aches and pains. Harry floated closely behind them to see what they were doing.

"Tonks, I want a silencing charm set up around here so he can't hear anything going on upstairs. Bill, set up an imperturbable charm, some warming charms. Charlie you get busy with anti-apparation, and anti-portkeys. I think we should also set up some invisible barrier charms, one way of course."

Resignedly they all set to work and soon the temporary cell was completed. Molly came down to inspect the place and added several additional items, mostly a comfortable simple bed, a privy and sink. She was about to add more when Moody stopped her.

"Molly this is not a permanent room for the boy, this is a detainment cell."

"But he's innocent and he should have a few comforts..."

"He'll only destroy them when he awakens, and we don't know that he is innocent for sure." Moody grunted looking over the still body lying on the floor bound.

"Moody, be reasonable. Maybe this will make a difference for him."

"Arthur you're too soft. No Dumbledore has put me in charge of this operation and I will run it how I see fit. **EVERYONE OUT NOW! MOVE!**" Moody shouted waving his arms to get them moving.

Defiantly Mrs. Weasley walked over to Harry's form and levitated him onto the bed before turning on her heel and huffing, the others followed her reluctantly with Moody taking up the rear.

The real Harry remained behind to inspect the wards they had cast strengthening them and adding several more to ensure Lucious would not get away or that anyone else but him was able to remove him from the cell. The order would be quite surprised to find they had a permanent prisoner until Harry decided to remove him. Satisfied everything was in order he sent a signal to Remus that everything was fine through the copper button and went upstairs to listen in on the conversation he knew his so called friends would be having.

In the room that Ron and Harry used to share at Grimmauld, Harry waited resting comfortably in the shadows. He didn't have to wait long as within a few minutes Ron, Fred, George, Ginny and finally Hermione entered with crestfallen looks marring their faces and slumped onto the two beds occupying the room. Ron and Hermione sat next to each other on one of the beds, Ron holding Hermione against his chest while she cried and Ginny and the Twins took up the other bed.

"Oh Ron how could we? He must really hate us now!"

"Hush Hermione," Ron said in an angry whisper.

"Ron, what is it? Oh it was so horrible, I've never seen him act like that."

"Nothing 'Mione." Ron stiffened his back. "I wonder if Percy saw him like that before he killed him." He added under his breath.

Although Ron didn't mean for anyone to hear it, Hermione and a certain unseen individual did. Harry flinched at the remark and the ice sharp pain that stabbed at his heart. Ron still thought he was guilty! Harry should have known better, he thought he had put all those terrible feelings behind him but here was Ron cutting the old wound open again. Not a deep cut, but it was enough to have those feelings of betrayal flood through and attempt to overwhelm him.

How could they, he had loved them, he would have died for any of them. He had thought they were friends and family, that they loved him, were there to support him. His thoughts drifted back to that summer when he had learned a secret from Ginny, actually he had wrangled it out of her by making her feel so guilty that he was so alone locked up at Privet Drive that she had told him to brighten his spirits. The Weasley family had saved up enough money to finally buy him his own hand for the famous Weasley Family clock. Harry was overwhelmed with this gesture of love that it didn't matter that he couldn't see it until his birthday. It would always be there as a symbol that he belonged somewhere, was part of a family. But then that night happened, and instead of placing his hand on the clock they blasted his picture out of it and mangled it beyond recognition right in front of him during the trial. He had tried to hold back the sobs that were racking his body, tried to hold back the tears, but the pain in his heart was overwhelming. All the joyful times he had spent at the Burrow were disintegrated in a flash. They were false memories now, only surviving to remind him that they had never really cared about him, just like no one else really cared about him. He was the fucking bloody savior who was suppose to rid the world of Voldemort and his followers so others could have what he never did. What was a peaceful life anyway? He never had it! Ron had it and didn't even realize it, the fool!

"STOP ENOUGH!" Harry screamed in his mind forcing the painful thoughts away. Controlling them and forcing them back into their own place he succeeded. Silence filled the room. Hermione had stopped crying and was looking at Ron in disbelief.

"Ron you can't! Please say you don't still believe....." Hermione had removed herself from his arms and backed away from him on the bed.

"I don't know Hermione, " Ron said looking at the floor.

Hermione searched the faces of the others in the room before turning back to Ron and shaking her head.

"What about you three?" she asked still looking at Ron.

She didn't get an answer and she carefully looked over at them trying to see into their faces for a sign they believed Harry was innocent. Ginny was the only one that met her gaze. She nodded quietly and then got up off the bed and left the room. Hermione followed her out leaving the three boys to their own silent conversation. As the door closed the twins raised their heads as one and looked over at their brother.

"Do you really think he did it Ron?"

"You knew him better than us, but I just can't see it."

When Ron didn't respond the twins looked at each other communicating thoughts no others could understand.

Ron finally lifted his head to look across the room. "I still believe he's guilty, I just can't understand it all."

Harry could take no more and left to return home. Remus was nowhere to be seen and Harry was growing more agitated. He kept trying to hold back the flood gates to his emotions but they built until finally they burst forth. Knowing that he had to calm down he reached for the only thing he knew could do it. Instead of retrieving a glass he drank straight from the bottle tipping it up to his mouth and throwing his head back he took several gulps. Tell tale flames of the Firewhiskey engulfed his stomach warming him but it didn't have any effect where he needed it most so he tipped the bottle up again. Remus walked in at that moment and was shocked to see Harry downing a bottle of Firewhiskey. Dropping the clothes he was carrying he walked over to Harry and gently forced the bottle down and away from Harry who looked at him with such pain in his eyes pleading to let him continue that Remus grabbed two glasses and poured them both some. After downing the glass he firmly but gently forced Harry to sit down on the couch, taking a seat next to him.

"Harry what is it, I thought everything went fine?"

"Yeah, I'm locked up tighter than a virgin." Harry said wryly eyeing the whiskey bottle longingly.



Remus followed his gaze and ignored it. "You sound like Sirius"

Harry smirked, "Well I guess that's what I get for spending 4 years with him, glad something rubbed off."

"Harry, please tell me, I can't help if I don't know what's going on."

"Ron still believes I'm guilty."

"Oh"

"The Bloody git still thinks I could kill someone! I can't believe him! I can't believe this is all happening all over again." Harry said burying his head in his hands.

"Harry calm down, he'll come around. Once we have the evidence he'll....."

"No Moony he won't." Harry shrugged off the comforting arm around his shoulders and stood up reached for the bottle and without another word headed up to his room locking the door.

The feeling of depression that had swamped Harry the night of Ron's revelation stayed with Harry over the next week. He was moody and quick to anger and Remus had decided to tread lightly around the volatile teen. Remus kept himself busy straightening up their new home adding a few extra touches he believed Harry would enjoy to include expanding and deepening the basement as a practice area and a green house to the back of the house. Obtaining several rare specimens from a few shady connections, and other normal plants for a variety of potions he soon had the beginnings of a conservatory that would rival Hogwarts own.

Keeping busy with the nightly raids of the Death Eaters, Harry had little time to spend with Remus as it was and he was happy that Remus felt at home enough to make the impressive additions. He felt bad for avoiding Remus, especially after their talks at the beginning. He had grown closer to Remus and he felt a twinge of guilt at the thought, but he couldn't get over what Ron and the twins had said. Every night he meditated trying to sort the memories and feelings

associated with them but he couldn't seem to block them out, to make them abide his wishes to deal with them later. So it was with small relish and anticipation that he interrupted the nightly entertainment. It gave him little pleasure to hurt the Death Eaters and take them into custody, and each time the pleasure dimmed. He no longer enjoyed playing around with them and decided it was time to prove his innocence and find a way to secure Azkaban, but first he would see how old Tom was doing.

Slipping into the now familiar feeling of weightlessness that was associated when he attempted to read Voldemort's mind, he sought out the connection and traced it back to its source. Immediately he could tell that Voldemort was still feeling the effects of Harry's last conversation. Voldemort was regaining his strength and power but Harry was satisfied with the magnitude of the blow he had given Tom. Like a shadow he bypassed the strong shields the Dark Lord held and started seeking the information he wanted. Concentrating only on his mission he wasn't completely aware about what was going on in reality and was slightly surprised when he was distracted by a surge of anger that enveloped Voldemort's mind. It felt like a searing heat had engulfed him, like he had been thrown into boiling water. Mentally gasping at the pain he had to concentrate harder in order to keep Voldemort from detecting him in his mind. The feeling subsided to be replaced with one of joy, he was shocked, he had never imagined this evil soul could feel joy. When he turned to find the cause of this feeling he was sickened by what he saw. Looking through the eyes of Voldemort to the real world he noticed three black robed forms writhing and screaming in pure agony on the ground before him. Searching Voldemort's mind Harry discovered that the Cruciatus had been cast on the figures and this was what was creating the joy Voldemort felt, it wasn't as strong a curse as it could have been, but it didn't matter to the figures laying on the ground in pain. Only Harry knew Voldemort couldn't cast anything stronger yet. Fighting off the nausea, Harry forced himself to watch. When Voldemort finally released the men from the curse Harry waited to see what would happen next.

"I grow tired of your incompetence!" he hissed at them. "First a sixteen year old boy eludes my finest Death Eaters, but is still incarcerated by that fool Dumbledore and you cannot even discover

where they are keeping him. Now my faithful followers can't even complete the simple task I lay before them because of some mysterious wizard?" Voldemort eyed the Death Eaters in the room menacingly, daring any of them to speak. "Oh yes, I forgot what you have all said about him being a powerful wizard and the ease with which he dispatches our forces." He said suspiciously sweet. He stalked around the room as if in search of prey and could smell the fear emanating from his followers. 'Good they should be afraid, they have failed me, all of them. But do they fear me enough? I think they need to be taught a more prudent lesson that I will not tolerate failure! Who should I use, I cannot afford losing another of my inner circle, so who should I use?'

Harry heard this entire internal monologue and felt a sense of dread rising in his heart. Whoever Voldemort chose would not be seeing the next day and he shivered as a cold tingle raised the hair on the back of his neck. He was responsible for this, the man that would die tonight would die because of him, because of what he was doing, the guilt threatened to overwhelm him, almost making him believe he was no better than Voldemort. A small voice reminded Harry that he was saving innocent lives by what he was doing and that the Death Eater deserved whatever they got. They chose to join Voldemort and should have known what their 'Dark Lord' was capable of. The guilt still ate at Harry but he also felt pride that he was causing so much disruption within the ranks of the evil forces.

"Goyle!" Voldemorts shouted in a hiss.

'So he was released from the Ministry.' Harry thought.

A short stocky man stepped out of the black sea of robes and kneeled before his master. "Y-Yes master," he said from beneath the hood covering his face, then lowered himself to the floor and kissed the hem of Voldemorts robes.

Ignoring the man at his feet, Voldemort continued to glare out at his servants. "Tell me Goyle, who is this wizard that so easily overcomes my forces. How is it that you know of him, have you seen this man?"

“N-No master. It is said that he wears black concealing robes and overcomes our forces swiftly and thoroughly. He never allows any to escape, my Lord.”

Harry was shocked that the man had been able to make comprehensive sentences. The Goyle he knew from school must not have inherited this from his father, although it looked like they had the same build.

“I see,” Voldemort continued. “So if he never allows any to escape, then pray tell how do you come by your information?”

“M-My L-Lord, it is from those that are released from the ministry after interrogation.”

“And how is this reliable information?”

Goyle smartly did not answer this question.

“How Goyle!” Voldemort demanded anger flaring again. “TELL ME HOW MY FAITHFUL FOLLOWERS CANNOT OVERTAKE ONE MAN WHEN WE HAVE MANY. TELL HOW MY DEATH EATERS FAIL TO RETRIEVE A WEAKLING 16 YEAR OLD BOY AND NOW CANNOT FIND HIM! YOU HAVE FAILED ME FOR THE LAST TIME! YOU WILL NOT FAIL ME AGAIN! THIS IS WHAT HAPPENS TO THOSE WHO FAIL! NAGINI!” he shouted anger spilling off him causing the death eaters to shrink back from their master, the fate of Goyle now dawning in their minds.

A rattling sound could be heard entering the room and getting louder as a large snake approached the center of the room and circled her master. The snake lifted it's head flicking it's tongue out in a hiss to him and waited. Her body coiled around Goyle trapping him, barely letting him breathe. Goyle flinched at the touch of the snake and seemed to withdraw into himself, a small puddle formed around his knees but no-one noticed this except Harry, watching in horror as the realization of what Voldemort was planning came crashing across his mind.

Voldemort slowly nodded at his snake with a sickly evil grin and the snake snapped its head at Goyle. It seemed as if the snake was scrutinizing the man trapped in the coils of her body, trying to figure out the best way to consume her long awaited meal. The man was big, yes, too big for her to swallow whole, he would have to be made into smaller pieces. She would relish the pain it caused the man and the blood that would pool around him. She loved the smell of blood and it made her primal instincts hum with anticipation. It would be better if she were allowed to hunt this man down, but she would take what her master offered.

The Death Eaters watched in morbid fascination as one of their own was seemingly being inspected by their Lords large snake. They didn't understand what would happen and waited with fearful anticipation. Beads of sweat rolled down Goyle's head, he didn't move, he couldn't, he didn't even raise his eyes to look at the snake, they were clenched shut in fear.

The snake struck out with its fangs ripping into the upper arm of the man, blood gushed and the man screamed as the snake finally tore his arm from his body. Blood pooled quickly and spread out, the Death Eaters backed away from the encroaching liquid fearing it to touch any part of them. Goyle continued to scream in agony not caring about the others around him or his pride, he knew now he was going to die a horrible death and the others realized it as well.

Voldemort returned to his throne and sat watching intently as his loyal snake continued to dissect his once faithful follower. It wouldn't be too much of a loss; he was a mere brute, good at following orders, no more, no less. The screams continued to fill the room echoing off the dungeon walls and no one was left unaffected, just as Voldemort had planned. He breathed in the smell of the fear, disgust and malevolence fogging the room and reveled in it. He closed his eyes in ecstasy blocking out the forms of his followers when suddenly the screams were cut off, a soft gurgling could be heard and then nothing. Voldemort opened his eyes again to see that Nagini had succeeded in ripping the man's throat out. Goyle was dead, Voldemort was disappointed, he hoped Nagini would prolong her torture of the man. He watched his Death Eaters and saw to his satisfaction that they were riveted to the sight of Goyle's demise. He made them watch until

she had finished her meal and the remaining blood that pooled on the floor was gone.

Standing slowly he stepped forward and addressed his followers. Before he could address them, Harry took action. Thoroughly disgusted and morally drained from what he had witnessed he lashed out at Voldemort. Forcing pure white magic from his mind he reached out and grasped at Voldemorts mind focusing hard. The magic spilled forth at his command and encompassed its target. Voldemort screamed in agony as it touched his mind. His followers were dumbstruck staring in horror as their master screamed in pain and dropped to his knees cradling his head for the second time this summer. Harry continued the attack and let the power surge, he would incapacitate Voldemort and make him feel what he so callously did to others. The power to destroy the Dark Lord was at his fingertips, but he wasn't ready to take him out just yet. He would weaken Voldemort again. This time it would take a lot longer for Voldemort to regain his powers, at least several months, and it would irritate him to no end that he couldn't retaliate even against his own followers. After several minutes pouring magic into Voldemorts mind he let go. Voldemort continued to scream and fell to the ground in pain. The force unleashed upon him would continue to cause him pain for the next hour, in which all of his followers would witness his incapacitation, further humiliating the Dark Lord. They were too afraid to move to assist their Lord, not wanting to be punished they stood in horror as the most powerful dark lord in history writhed on the ground screaming.

Harry was drained and left Voldemorts mind, the Death Eaters would not be a problem for a while. They would be too confused and disoriented without their master to guide them. Voldemort would be unconscious from the attack for several months. Harry could only hope that his followers were too scared to move him and hoped that they would leave him where he lay on the cold stone floor of a dark dungeon while he recovered. The man, if you could call him that, didn't deserve to be comfortable, lying in a nice, soft, warm bed. Harry had never had it, so why should this evil monster deserve it.

Waking from his meditation he slumped back into his own bed and slept.

## Chapter 6—Ministry Pranks

Remus watched Harry as he entered the kitchen several days later rubbing the sleep out of his eyes. He had been quiet the last couple days, reading in the library and for a while helping Remus in the green house snipping and pruning the plants in silence. He was worried about Harry but knew when he was ready he would talk to him about it, so Remus didn't push and continued to observe the young man.

"Good morning Harry, you hungry?"

"'Mornin' Moony, yeah, starving. Any tea?"

"Help yourself, there's a plate for you on the counter, kept it warm, didn't know when you were going to wake."

"Sorry, I know I've been distant the last week. A lot on my mind."

"Care to talk about it?"

Harry considered this and after a careful glance at Remus, who was sipping his coffee looking nonchalantly at the Daily Prophet, shrugged his shoulders and sat down to eat. While consuming his food he thought about what to tell Remus. Finishing he wiped his mouth with a napkin, took several sips of tea then sat back once again staring intently at the unresponsive werewolf.

"How do you do that?" Harry asked tonelessly.

"Do what?"

"I know you are dying for me to tell you what I've been thinking and doing this last week, yet you sit there calmly like nothing is going on, like it doesn't matter."

"Practice," was the only answer.

Harry chuckled and leaned forward on the table with his elbows.

“Voldemort and his death munchers won’t be participating in any further attacks for a while.” He stated bluntly.

Remus who had, up until now, been able to disguise his emotions nearly dropped the coffee cup he was lifting to his lips. His eyes nearly bugging out of his head, threw down the news paper and snapped his head up to meet Harry’s eyes. Startled by the the cold, calculating look in them, he gulped and took a deep breath to calm his nerves, which all of a sudden seemed to be tingling uncontrollably.

“What happened Harry? What did you do?”

“Well I visited his mind again last night. He’s been frustrated, well, over many things since I got out. First there’s always me. He’s so frustrated that no one can get to me, or at least the false me. What an arse, he doesn’t even have the slightest clue about the prophecy and yet he’s obsessed with me, a 16 year old weakling, in his terms. He can’t stand that he keeps getting whipped by me. Then there is the fact that his little raids keep getting interrupted and his ‘REIGN OF FEAR’” he said in a false official sounding voice, “isn’t succeeding, add to this that his numbers keep dwindling and new recruits are few and far between needless to say they are just below the level of morons. And of course there is the final coup de grace that I now can harm him. I think for the first time last night he felt what he has been inflicting on the world in surplus. He will be, shall we say, magically incapacitated for oh I’d say a month or two.”

“How Harry? I mean that’s great but even though he may not have his magic, surely the Death Eaters will continue.” Remus said not sounding sure of his argument, there must be something more to this.

“Well, I kinda made it so his Death Eaters watched him when I attacked. None of them moved to do anything, not sure whether it was from fear or....I don’t know. I do know this though; his Death Eaters won’t know what to do without him. Their head, so to speak, has been severed from the body and until Voldemort regains consciousness they won’t do anything for fear of their masters’ wrath.”



Remus, although knowing of Harry's immense power and knowledge, was surprised by this reasoning and show of maturity. Much much more had changed in Harry over the past year and he cringed inwardly at the cause of it all. Once again he spoke silently to his former friends to forgive him for not being there for the boy.

"Oh Remus, there is one more thing, Voldemort killed Mr. Goyle. I know he was a death eater and all but it was horrible. He had Nagini his snake rip him apart and eat him. Even thinking about it I feel sick."

Remus gulped at this revelation and reached out to place a shaky hand on Harry's shoulder. Harry stiffened at first then relaxed looking up into the worried and slightly frightened eyes of his friend. "You okay Harry? This is not something you should be seeing, but I know I can't stop it. You have seen so much for a man of your age, too much Harry. I regret looking into your eyes and seeing only what should be reflected in a man that has lived his life to the end. I regret not seeing the happiness that should be there, the laughter, and scheming a 16 year old boy should be thinking about, the love from friends and family, but I know I cannot change the past. Harry I can only hope that you will not let these things crowd out all else, that someday you will be able to feel these things again, to let others back into your life. Only then can the healing begin."

"I know Remus, I understand. I never asked for all this, never wanted it, but it was forced upon me and I have to deal with it the best I know how. I'm trying but it's hard. I can barely look at my former friends without all the emotions surfacing. I feel like I'm drowning when that happens, like all the air is being sucked out of my lungs and a vice is clenching around my heart. It's too much right now. I hope someday things will be different but I'm not sure. You want to know something?" he said quietly and insecurely.

"What is that Harry?"

"When I was in the other realm, my mum and dad said that they wanted me to have a family of my own someday. That I couldn't possibly understand how wonderful it was until I did. All I could think about was being with them, I didn't want a family, who could possibly love me? I still don't know if I want one. Don't know if I would be any

better or worse than my Uncle Vernon was. Scared that I might turn out like him.”

“Harry?” Remus gasped and leaned forward raising Harry’s chin so their eyes met. “Harry what are you saying?”

“Nothing really, I just don’t want anyone to have to grow up the way I did. All my life all I ever wanted was to be normal like everyone else, but I know that will never be. I can only try to prevent anyone else being hurt the way I have been.”

“Harry, you are very special, and I don’t mean just because of everything that you have been through. It is because of how you have dealt with it that makes you special. You have bounced back stronger than before each and every time which shows a strength of character few possess. Look, even after everything you’ve been through your main driving force is to still help others and that is a noble thing.”

“Yeah, Hermione once said that I had a ‘saving people thing,’ I guess she was right about that at least.” He grimaced at the thought.

“Well there’s a lot to be said for that Harry. Some consider it a weakness while others consider it strength. It’s up to you to decide what you think of it.”

“Yeah I realize that and I’ve come a long way. I’m glad I have you here to talk to. The last four years with my parents and Sirius helped me with a lot of issues but they also warned be it would be difficult to face them. Without them being here to talk to it’s been more difficult than I thought. Thanks for listening to me and everything, I’m really glad you came looking for me even with everyone still against me.”

“Like I said Harry, you didn’t deserve all that’s happened. I just wish I was there to prevent it in the first place. I realize now that I put too much faith in the wisdom of an old man. Please don’t get me wrong Harry, I still believe that Dumbledore does what he feels is right in the best interest of everyone involved, but he is still only human. He overlooks many things that should not be overlooked.”

“Yeah he does. I’m still angry with him and the others.”

"It won't be easy Harry but as time goes on so must you. You will either learn how to get over this or you will not. It sounds simple but it's the truth. How you do either is up to you. I hope that you will be able to forgive them and let them all back into your life. I'm also angry with them for not believing you, but I believe that after evidence is presented they will realize their mistake and want back into your life."

"That's the thing Moony, I know how important evidence is but how could they believe I could do that. How could they believe I could so easily murder the Dursley's, Percy and Mrs. Figg. They were supposed to know me! They were my friends and family but they believed everyone BUT me! How can you do that to people who you are supposed to love. I just don't get it. They were my family, I loved them! I would have gladly died for any of them!" He said and buried his head in his hands trying to hide the emotions he couldn't hold back.

Remus reached forward and gently pulled Harry's hands away from his face and wiped Harry's tears away for him. "We're family now Harry, maybe not by blood, but we are just the same and we will go on from here. In time, our family will grow. Just give it time Harry and don't hold in all those emotions, it isn't healthy. They'll come bursting out when you least expect it. And I dare say that I wouldn't want to be around when that happened, if you get my meaning."

Harry chuckled through his tears and started to feel better. It felt good to talk to Remus again, he had an uncanny knack of knowing how to deal with things even though it did surprise him at times. He took things slow and steady and wouldn't force Harry into things, but he always seemed to know when he was ready to talk and was there for him. Harry imagined this was just like how a real father would act. In fact it was a lot like how his real father did act in the other realm in those four years. Looking at Remus in a new light he could now see the love and pride that shone in the older man's eyes for him and Harry swept forward and embraced the man.

Remus was initially shocked when Harry swung his arms around him but recovered and quickly returned the hug. It felt good to hold Harry in his arms and he pulled him closer forgetting about their awkward

positions at the dining table. He rubbed Harry's back in soothing circular motions and kissed his unruly mop gently. "I love you Harry, just like your true parents and Sirius love you." He whispered.

Harry felt warm, he was happy and loved, it was amazing what those three little words could do to a soul. He was bathed in the gentleness of the emotion and it grew as he thought of his mum, dad, and Sirius in the other realm, as well as the Fates and other teachers he had met that helped him there. They had loved him too but it hadn't really sunken in until Remus had made the simple but heart felt statement. The feeling had been so foreign to him that he didn't recognize it. "I love you too Moony." Remus pulled him tighter. He held Harry like that for awhile until Harry pulled back reluctantly.

"Moony would you like to help me tonight?"

Remus held Harry by the shoulders at arms length eyeing him critically. "What are you up to Harry?"

Harry tossed his head to the side and rolled his eye exaggeratedly, "Geez, nothing too dangerous, I think you'll like it. Besides I think it will help so we won't have to hide all the time. I'm getting sick of hiding my face. It's kind of ironic you know. Before all I could think about was wishing I could be someone else, now I just want to be myself. Plus it is a little sappy around here right now, we could use something to lighten up the mood." Remus chuckled and swatted Harry upside the head in mock disdain.

"It's not that sappy. I'd be glad to accompany you, what are we doing?"

Harry laughed, and swung a fist playfully at Remus' head. Remus knocked his arm away and pulled Harry forward off balance, causing him to fall forwards. Before Harry knew it Remus had crouched low still holding on to one of his arms leading Harry's body perfectly over one of his shoulders. Remus quickly stood up and locked an arm around Harry's legs.

"AAWWWHHHH. Moony put me down!" Harry tried to hit the man in his back but was disoriented when Remus swung himself around in

circles. Covering his eyes with his one free hand, Harry tried to block visions swirling around and creating his stomach to churn. Remus, caught up in his playful torture of Harry, didn't notice the stool sitting by the hearth and caught his foot on it sending them both painfully to the ground entangled with each other. Remus hit his elbow on the table before he fell and winced sharply. Harry knocked his head on one of the table legs and quietly rubbed his head ruefully staring at Remus. Remus stared back at Harry uncertainly holding his tingling arm.

"Harry?"

Harry couldn't contain himself any longer and burst out in laughter. He got up and pushed Remus' back then sprinted out of the kitchen only looking back to see if Remus was following. Remus only hesitated a second before righting himself and chasing after Harry. Harry was sprinting to the front door and was almost there when he was tackled from behind and once again they were on the floor however this time they were wrestling playfully with Remus trying to tickle Harry mercilessly. Tears running down both their faces from laughing and they were soon out of breath. Remus straddled the teens legs and continued to tickle Harry's ribs.

"MERCY!" Harry shouted gasping for breath trying to get Remus off him.

"What was that, cub, didn't quite hear you."

"MERCY PLEASE!"

"Oh alright, I guess." Remus said shoving off Harry to stand and then helped Harry to his feet.

Harry bent over bracing himself against his knees while catching his breath and wiping away the remaining tears from his face and eyes with his sleeve while Remus did the same walking over and slumping into the soft couch. After a few moment of heavy breathing they were able to regain control. Harry looked over at Remus who was watching him with a smirk on his face.

"I win!" Remus declared and they both laughed again.

"This time." Harry responded and Remus cocked an eyebrow.

Harry took a seat across from Remus and sat back running a hand through his hair suddenly turning serious.

"You wanna help me tonight?"

"What are we doing?"

Harry didn't miss the 'we' bit and his heart lightened suddenly realizing Remus was with him no matter what. "Well I need to get a few things in Diagon Alley first from the twins. No time like the present eh?"

"I have no idea what you are planning but I'll go along with it for now and expect a thorough briefing when we get back." Remus sighed.

Harry changed his appearance and Remus gave him the thumbs up and they walked outside for some prop shopping.

Upon entering Hogsmeade they noticed that it seemed to bustle with people. Although a popular wizarding town, there never seemed to be this many people roaming the quaint streets and Harry lifted an eyebrow at Remus in question. Remus only shrugged and they continued on their way. Harry noticed that quite a few people were reading the newspaper and became curious about what was going on. They walked on in silence.

"Remus! James!" a voice shouted through the crowd.

Both Harry and Remus looked around seeking out the source of the voice. Harry spotted her first and immediately his heart sank in his chest. A slim beautiful figure stood in front of their destination waving to them excitedly. She was radiant; her red gold hair sparkled in the light of the sun creating a halo effect around the soft womanly features of her face. Her smile was wide in welcoming and Harry sank deeper realizing it wasn't for him but for James and Remus. How he detested having to hide now.

Remus noticed the depressed droop of Harry's features and placed a reassuring hand on his shoulder. When Harry looked up to him trying to smile, Remus clearly understood the depth of feeling in those emerald eyes. They spoke of longing and a desire that wouldn't be fulfilled. Although the young man looked miserable, Remus suddenly felt lighter, he realized that Harry had opened up and that it wouldn't be too hard to bring life back to him. That after all this was ended there was a possibility that Harry could have a happy life. The only difficult part was trying to keep Harry from slipping away and getting him to understand that possibility as well.

"Perk up cub, we'll sort it all out, but for now we have a mission to get on with remember?"

"All too well Moony, all too well." Harry mumbled and lifted his head up in what looked like a cheery manner except it didn't make it to his eyes.

Remus nudged him and whispered, "Your eyes Harry."

Startled Harry immediately changed their color and just in time for Ginny came rushing through the crowd at them. They stopped and waited for her.

Ginny panting slightly when she reached them, immediately through herself into Remus' arms. "Oh Remus, where have you been? Everyone has been so worried, we all thought you went looking for Harry."

Remus hugged her back tightly. "It's good to see you too Ginny."

"Well?" she persisted.

"Well What?" Remus asked pulling a very innocent expression.

Harry watched amazed at the woman before him. She didn't even seem to recognize him while she barraged Remus for answers.

“Where have you been? You obviously didn’t find him because the stupid git showed up at Diagon Alley and got himself captured by the Ministry again. I’m so worried about him. But where have you been hiding and why?”

Remus deflected the questions by pulling James close to the two of them. “Ginny I would like you to meet a friend of mine, James Roper, this is Ginny Weasley.”

“Ah Remus we’ve met before, but it is nice to see you again Ginny.” Harry said politely not knowing where he stood. He was confused and anxious, and could feel the nervous sweat forming on his back and hoped that his hands weren’t clammy when she reached out to shake his hand. He was upset that Ginny thought him to be a stupid git but was elated that she was worried about him. She continually baffled him and had to force the feelings away for now.

“Nice to see you too James.” But she wasn’t side tracked, turning back to Remus she gave him one of her famous glares that clearly stated that the conversation wasn’t ended and he would have to answer to a lot more later on. Remus silently cringed and was thankful that he was with Harry now which would provide a convenient and successful dodging of the young lady’s temper.

“How do you know each other?” Ginny asked now eyeing Harry.

“Oh, I thought I explained that the other night.”

“No you didn’t, in fact I don’t know much about you really.”

“I’m hurt, after that wonderful evening we spent together at the Three Broomsticks.” Harry said placing his hand over his heart in mock pain.

Ginny laughed and Harry’s spirit soared at the sound of it. Remus chuckled.

“Ginny why don’t we continue on to your brother’s store, if it’s open, I have a few things I would like to get.”



“Oh great. Today’s the big opening, you timed it perfectly. What are you looking for?” she said slipping in between the two men and grabbing the arms they offered her. She giggled at the show of chivalry from the men and they walked chatting lightly about the various products the twins had to offer.

When they entered both Remus and Harry were in awe at the impressive displays in the shop. Harry would love to spend hours in here just going through all the products. The twins had definitely been busy over the last year. This slightly disheartened him but he shook himself when Ginny broke contact with him and he searched her out trying to regain that contact. Remus noticed and again placed a comforting hand on his shoulder which reminded Harry of his purpose here today. Blocking his depressing thoughts he steadied himself and walked to his destination with Remus following close behind. Ginny had gone off to help her brothers since the store seemed to be attracting numerous clients.

“Harry what are these? They look like wands.” He whispered leaning closer to Harry’s shoulder while fingering one of the items.

“Exactly Remus, I’ll need about, oh say, 10, it’s an even number don’t you think?” Harry turned to smirk at his friend.

“What for?”

“Not here, Moony, but these wands look pretty normal don’t they?”

“Yeah?”

“Well when used, let’s just say they don’t work like expected.”

“Oh” was all Remus could say.

Harry picked up ten of the wands and placed them in a basket and headed up to the front to pay for them.

One of the twins was ringing him up absently, not noticing who they were. Before anyone could notice Remus slightly nudged Harry and slipped out of the store, so as to avoid being accosted by Ginny.

Coward Harry laughed to himself at how such a slight and beautiful girl could instill such fear in a man.

“That will be ten galleons please,” the red head asked politely then lifted his eyes from the register to his customer. “Oh hi James, didn’t know you were coming. Planning some big party or something? You’ll get your money’s worth out of these handy pranks.” He smirked wagging his eyebrows.

Harry chuckled and nodded his head. “Yeah something like that. Have a business event I thought needed to be lightened up a bit.”

“Well if you tell me what kind of business you’re in maybe I could help you out a little further?” the man he thought was Fred asked.

“Hey Fred, quit holding up the customers, we gotta line forming here.”

“Oh sorry, just thought James here could use some more help entertaining guests at a business function.” Fred shouted over the noise of the crowd.

“Yeah sure, GINNY! Get up to the second register will ya?”

Ginny came bounding around the counter and opened the register to start helping the waiting customers. She smiled at James.

Fred eyed his sister suspiciously then James, and smirked when he saw the blush that crept onto the mans face. This would definitely help a sale.

“So what type of business you in James?”

“Huh? What?” Harry responded, he was lost in the warm smile Ginny was wearing and hadn’t heard the questions.

“I said, what type of business you in James. I could help ya with your entertainment.”

"Oh, um.....no it's consulting work, and I think this will be all I need." Harry said regretfully breaking eye contact with Ginny and facing Fred.

"Consulting huh? Consulting for what?"

"Oh...uh...that would be .....uh...Spectral Acquisitions." Harry said praying desperately that Fred would believe the lie and wishing he had followed his parents advice in coming up with a better cover story earlier.

Fred crossed his arms over his chest and stared at Harry, Ginny chuckled softly ringing up another customer and Harry noticed her eyes dart to him quickly before returning to the customer.

"Never heard of it." Fred stated flatly.

"Well it's a fairly new business that started up in New York and the owners are trying to get a division set up over here in Britain. You know branching out." Harry shrugged and grabbed his parcel. Turning to leave he was stopped by a hand grabbing his arm at the door.

"If you see Remus, tell him I'll be waiting for those answers." Ginny stated firmly then let go. "See ya around James."

"See ya Gin." Harry stepped out of the store and didn't notice the shocked expression on Ginny's face. Returning home he saw Remus and they entered together. Deciding to make dinner before their preparations, Harry explained the plan while they ate. Remus was quite impressed and eager to assist.

"Will you ever cease to impress me Harry? No, no, please don't. I am rather looking forward to the outcome of tonight's events. I just wish I could be there to watch it all."

"I could arrange it if that's what you want, no problem."

"Do realize how much like your father you are? It's amazing. Please don't take it the wrong way Harry. You have both your mother and father in you. It's just that when I taught you in your third year I saw

more of Lily's side. Now James seems to keep popping out when least expected."

Harry felt a little down but also pride at being likened to his father. He was tired of being constantly compared to his parents by those that knew them. He was just Harry but no one saw that, he was his own person with his own thoughts and feelings but somehow they all expected so much more. But he also liked the fact that he had some of the qualities of his parents that he had come to love in the other realm.

"Harry, I know you're your own person, but I am just getting to know you all over again and it's a little shocking when you say or do something that your parents did. It just brings back memories. Good memories Harry, and I thank you for that."

Harry didn't know what to say, he never expected Remus to say something like that but it did lighten his heart a little. He shrugged and stroked his hair and noticed Remus smile.

"Finished?" Harry asked looking at the empty dinner plate.

Remus followed Harry's gaze trying to understand what Harry was getting at then comprehended the question.

"Yeah." He stood up rubbing his hands together in anticipation. "Does the potion really work? How long does it last again?"

"Remus, you surprise me! You're almost as bad as I am."

"Once a Maruader always a marauder. In fact I think we're going to have to come up with a nickname for you to enter the group."

"Me? A maurauder? Moony get a grip, I've never been good at pulling pranks, you know that." Harry said as they entered his trunk.

"Oh I'd say everything that you've done so far qualifies you and besides you pulled all those pranks with James, Sirius and Merlin." Remus said as he closed the lid behind him.

"It seems that minister Fudge has decided to take the matter out of our hands Minerva," Albus Dumbledore stated tiredly rubbing the bridge of his nose.

"But how can he not believe the boy is innocent Albus?" Professor McGonnagal asked calmly from her seat in the kitchen at Grimmauld Place.

"That very same question could be asked of all of us Minerva. We just don't have the evidence we need." Dumbledore sighed heavily.

"Albus we won't turn him over, not until evidence has been...." Molly Weasley began.

"I'm afraid we have no choice, Molly. We have been unable to locate any evidence to help Mr. Potter and Cornelius has tied our hands with the Wizengamot."

"Surely you have more sway there than Fudge does Albus? After all the misguidance Fudge spread about You-Know-Who and then him turning up at the ministry and such, does that count for nothing?"

"Arthur that is old news to the people, they see Harry as a threat, which he quite possibly could be. Now Molly if you look at it realistically it's true," he said trying to stave off her angry remarks. "You have all seen the Daily Prophet today and realize that the minister is using this situation to his advantage for the re-elections this fall."

"I think it's disgusting, what that man is doing." Molly stated haughtily, crossing her arms across her ample chest.

"I agree with Molly, Albus, how can we just turn the boy over? They'll just throw him back in Azkaban. He'll....."

Before anything further could be said, an eerie glow encompassed the room freezing everyone in mid movement. They tried to struggle and found they couldn't move or speak. Only their eyes were free to roam and they looked at each other in intense fear and dread. An extremely bright flash of light blinded them momentarily and when

they were able to blink away the spots they found themselves in the Ministry. In fact they were standing in the office of the minister of magic itself. Still unable to move they scanned the room fear continuing to grow. Sitting at his desk staring into the fireplace sat Cornelius Fudge himself twirling his wand absently through his fingers and oblivious to their presence. Tonks broke the silence startling them all.

“Albus what’s going on?”

“I am not quite sure Miss Tonks, but I am quite relieved to hear your voice and mine. Can anyone move?”

Everyone stated the negative and all eyes looked upon Fudge waiting for his reaction.

“Minister Fudge?” Albus spoke trying to get the mans attention. A few shouts rang through the room but to no avail, the minister could not see them.

“What are we doing here Albus?” a tense Mr. Weasley asked.

“It seems there is some purpose we are here, but I am unaware of it. I believe we have no choice but to wait and see what happens.” Albus stated resigning to sit and watch, or in the present case stand since he couldn’t move.

Unbeknownst to the order members, Harry and Remus watched laughing at their reactions, concealed in a corner of the room. After waiting 10 minutes and seeing the agitation of the people in the room build Harry turned to Remus and nodded. Remus placed a hand over his mouth to silence his laugh even though it wasn’t necessary.

The door to the office burst open and all the order members cringed but couldn’t draw their wands. 10 Death Eaters ran into the room startling Fudge, who had flipped his chair backwards to the ground. He hid behind his desk as the Death Eaters surrounded him. None of them said a thing or even glanced at the order members. Fudge tried to back away from the wands pointed at him until he found he could move no more. An inconvenient wall blocked his retreat and he curled

his fat knees, as much as he could, to his fat chest trying to make a smaller target. The lead Death Eater shook his head as if in signal and three of the black robed figures removed themselves from the group and started searching the office.

"What do you want you can have anything, just tell me and it's yours." Cornelius Fudge whined. He received no response. Feeling a little more courageous that they weren't cursing him he lifted his head up high. "What is the meaning of this, I was assured that as long as I refused the knowledge of your lords return I would be unharmed. Why has that arrangement been breached? If you don't speak up I shall call the aurors and you shall all be turned over to Azkaban."

The room filled with inaudible gasps from the order members as Fudge spilled his guts to the Death Eaters.

"Why haven't the alarms gone off Kingsley?" Tonks asked.

"I am not sure, and I don't like the feeling of this." Kingsley replied.

"It seems that our esteemed minister has been bought off." Bill stated angrily through gritted teeth.

"We have known this for a long time William, but we have been unable to find proof of the matter." Albus said.

"I see a recurring theme here." Bill grated out.

They watched as Fudge continued his rant until one of the death eaters searching the office found a hidden safe and began pulling reams of parchment and folders out of it. Once again the lead death eater noticed this and nodded his head. The dark group began to back out of the room.

The order members felt a tingling sensation and could feel their wands in their respective hands and as the death eaters backed out of the room they were able to move. Dumbledore and Moody were the first to spring in to action followed quickly by the others. They stepped forward clearly startling the Death Eaters by their sudden appearance. Death Eaters eyed order members and then someone

shot a stunner taking out one of the black clad men. Fudge tried to hide further in his corner when Dumbledore appeared out of nowhere and no alarms sounded. His eyes remained fixed on the documents clutched in the death eaters arms. If anyone got hold of those it could be his undoing.

Once the order members sprung forward the death eaters took up the fight. Almost as one they lifted their wands to fire, and the death eaters found they could speak again. They had to get out of the office, it was a mantra running through their heads, their lord and master needed these files and they would die before being caught. It was a carefully laid plan and Fudge was powerless to stop it. Another death eater fell to a stunner. One of the death eaters tried to shoot a cutting curse but was surprised when his wand made a loud 'CRACK' and turned into a rubber chicken. The squawking of said chicken filled the room startling everyone present. Silence reigned as every eye trained on the chicken. Another death eater taking advantage of the immobility shot off a curse but his wand turned into a bouquet of flowers, then another turned into a fountain shooting water, while another shot confetti into the air. It seemed that all the Death Eaters wands were fake and they were dumbfounded. The Order members who didn't dare to laugh at their good fortune easily stunned the remaining Death Eaters and bound them to take into custody.

Fudge recovered quickly after seeing that the death eaters had been detained. He scrambled up out of his corner and moved forward quickly to retrieve his documents. Before he could reach them and eerie stiffness once again pervaded the room and everyone was frozen again.

"Well, well, well, what do we have here Fudge? What could you possibly be hiding in a secret safe within the Ministry?" An ethereal voice rang through the room. Suddenly a young man with brown hair and blue eyes appeared from a corner of the room and walked forward to pick up the documents.

"You cannot touch those, they are important secret documents of the minister and property of the ministry, you will be arrested for theft for touching them." Fudge spat out arrogantly.



“Oh I know they are secret documents Fudge. I also know that these documents will be your downfall.” James paused in his efforts to look upon the faces before him. Fudge’s face was a dark crimson, Harry thought that if any more blood rushed to the mans face he would burst. The others had shocked expressions or anger written across their face.

“Well if it isn’t the esteemed bumbling Headmaster Dumbledore. I have heard quite a lot about you old man!”

“How dare you speak to him like that!” Molly shouted indignantly.

“Mrs. Weasley I would be quiet if I were you, you have no idea about what this fool has done.” James said in a deadly cold but calm voice.

“Now see here you nasty little...”

“SILENCE!” Harry yelled and no one could talk. “Much better. Now I believe you all heard earlier the minister incriminate himself, and I believe an investigation should be conducted into his dealings with Death Eaters. What do you think? I’ll take your silence as agreement, good.” Harry laughed throwing his head back. “It’s so nice when there are no arguments. I think the minister should be removed and detained you agree? Of course you do. I’ll be right back.”

They watched helplessly as the man disappeared with Cornelius Fudge. Believing they couldn’t be shocked any further they cringed when the man returned not a minute later still laughing almost maniacally.

“Now Mr. Weasley step forward.” Harry waited for the man but he didn’t move. “Oh sorry, almost forgot, now you will not be able to use your wand so don’t try anything. You see I heard your little discussions earlier about evidence and I’m here to provide you with what you need. I am afraid that you will be overly shocked by what is contained in these files, and I believe you will do the right thing with them. I hope to see results within the week, if not, I will take matters in my own hands.” Harry released Mr. Weasley from his frozen state and the man walked forward timidly eyeing his wife and Dumbledore for approval. Dumbledore could only blink and Arthur Weasley took

this as a sign and stepped forward to retrieve the offered files. He looked closely at the man before him and felt an instant flash of familiarity but couldn't place it. For an instant he thought the mans eyes flashed an emerald green. Shaking his head he looked again into the mans eyes and saw they were bright blue. Taking the documents he continued to stare.

"Who are you?"

"Oh, it's not important," the man shrugged.

"Who are you?" Arthur persisted.

"Well, alright, if you must know." The man said in mock exasperation with a hint of amusement. "I am a protector of the light, but that's all I'll tell you. Once again, I ask you do the right things with those documents." With that Harry disappeared along with the unseen Remus and the order members were free from their frozen state.

"Arthur I believe we need to head back to headquarters, please make sure those documents are safeguarded there until we can review them. Kingsley, please check the ministry for Cornelius and notify Amelia Bones. Join us all at headquarters when you are done. Everyone we have a meeting to attend." Albus commanded and then disappeared.

Upon arrival Albus nodded to Moody and they headed to the basement to check on their prisoner. A few others followed curious at Albus intentions.

"What is it Albus?" Moody asked when they reached their special detainment cell seeing their prisoner lying unconscious on the bed.

"Moody I thought for a minute.. but it couldn't be. Something is amiss, I can feel it but I cannot place it." Albus said as he drooped his shoulders.

"EVERYONE UPSTAIRS NOW!" A voice shouted down to them. Without hesitation they all crowded up the stairs to the kitchen.

“What is it Arthur?” Molly asked laying a hand on her husbands shoulders and trying to discern the problem.

“Oh Merlin Albus! Harry was innocent! It’s all here, black and white. Fudge had signed confessions from numerous Death Eaters while under Veritaserum. Look!” Arthur said brandishing several documents to the others fury raging in his eyes. “What have we done?”

“Hey dad look at this. This one is a note from Lucious paying Fudge to cover the documents. Merlin from these others Fudge must have a healthy sum tucked away somewhere.” Bill said as he scanned more documents.

The others were appalled, they couldn’t believe their minister had committed treason for his own benefit.

“Rotten little toady bastard. I always thought he was a smarmy....”

“MOODY LANGUAGE PLEASE!” Molly screeched. “Harry, oh Harry, Albus please can we let him out?”

“No Molly, I do not believe it safe, but I think he deserves the right to know what we have found. I will go speak to him now.” Dumbledore turned to head back downstairs and was joined by all the members. “Please, Bill will you remain to guard the documents, I will not insist on the rest of you remaining behind.”

“Quite right!” Molly huffed.

It was a sordid, quiet group that returned to the basement. Emotions ran wild through the group as the realization dawned that they had betrayed an innocent man.

Molly was in a tizzy ringing her hands in the apron she wore. She had always told the boy that he was just like a son to her. Always tried to go out of her way to make sure he was comfortable at their home and accepted. They were delighted to make him one of the family and were proud of the clock hand they were finally able to afford with his picture on it. She had personally burned out that picture in front of his eyes during one of the hearings. She had been proud of the pained

look on his face at the time, now those eyes haunted her. How could she have done that? She turned so quickly against him and all those awful hurtful things she had said. She had even tried to spit on him as he was removed from the courtroom. Tears fell freely from her eyes as she thought about every nasty jibe she spat at the boy she once considered her own and why? Because her true son had been killed and she thought this unruly dark haired boy had done it? But she was wrong. Thinking back all of it fell into place. The boy had gone through so much, nearly killed on too many occasions she couldn't count, had risked his life not only to save their precious daughter but her husband as well. He had also pulled his friends, one of which was her son, out of numerous dangerous situations. He had also unselfishly given the twins money to start their shop. He never thought about himself, always throwing himself into the mix to save people he didn't even know. She fell for it, just like everyone else had done. She cursed herself for allowing it and prayed that some day she could make it up to the boy. She vowed never to doubt him again.

Arthur Weasley berated himself as he walked down the steps. It seemed to take an eternity to reach the bottom. How could he ever regain the boys trust. He hadn't been as close to the boy as his two youngest but he had seen a quality in the boy that many lacked. Harry was a brave and caring young man, so steadfast and loving. At first he couldn't understand how he had turned out the way he did with the family he was raised with but it didn't matter, the boy, no young man was what any father would be proud of. How could he of thought so differently during the trial. Just giving up and believing with the rest of them. He should have stood up and demanded a proper trial. Oh at the time he thought the boy was getting just what he deserved but did he? Was he so blinded by Percy's death that he didn't look to the obvious? Those files caused a dark rage to seethe in his soul. Percy was a death eater? How could that be, not a Weasley! Where did they go wrong to miss so many things while he was growing up. He knew Percy was ambitious, but that ambitious? It just wasn't fathomable, and now Harry was paying for their mistakes. They told him they had loved him as their own and then turned on him. They had even stolen from him. Oh how were they ever going to make things right.

Tonks fretted nervously. She hadn't really known Harry all that well, but watching him during fifth year she had come to think of the boy as a younger brother. Sure he was moody most of the time, but who wouldn't be with all he had been going through. He was the bloody Boy-Who-Lived and all that. She knew he didn't like the fame, it showed on his face whenever anyone teased him about it or insinuated he received special treatment. Any time he denied it he would be teased more, and she watched him slowly retreat into himself, hiding his emotions. Is that where they missed it? If they had only listened, truly listened would they have been able to set things right before all this? Now where would he be? If he was really insane, what kind of life would he have now? Would they have to lock him up in St. Mungos with all the other crazies? Why had they all refused to give him Veritaserum and tell his side of the story? Oh yes we were all caught up in too much 'righteous anger' to think properly, but that was no excuse. They would have administered it to others wouldn't they? Confusion reigned and she couldn't form anymore coherent thoughts as she worried over the boy locked away in the basement.

Moody grumbled to himself, how could he, an auror of the highest standing, who had fought in battle so many times before have overlooked the obvious. His mantra 'Constant Vigilance' had failed him. No he had failed! The boy had proven himself to the world so many times in the past and he had failed him. Constance Vigilance now was thrown back in his face like a slap. The situation was so obvious and they, the fighters for light, protectors of the innocent had goofed it up, goofed it up big. Now the boy was acting like a wild animal and whose fault was it, their's, no one else. We all failed him.

Charlies' thoughts ran along the same path. Both he and Bill had accepted Harry as another younger brother, tried to include him, had treated him the same as their other brothers. They had seen how shy the boy was and how he always seemed to have a look of longing every time he came to the burrow. How he had watched their family interactions with confusion but joy at their laughter, how he had cringed anytime they fought. They knew he felt responsible for Percy's withdrawal from the family but tried to make him realize it wasn't. Then that night, and they had turned their back on him. Percy's death was a blow to them all and it hurt deeply, they had never reconciled before his death and that seemed to make it more

painful but what pain had they inflicted on their adoptive brother? Had they screwed up beyond repair? Harry was innocent and he vowed to make it right.

Minerva McGonnagal was disgusted with herself, she had been there when the boy was first taken to the Dursley's and was not confident in the choice Albus had made in leaving him with them. She had observed the family all day and wasn't impressed, her reservations however were overridden by the trust and faith she had in the headmaster. When he had finally returned to the wizarding world she had watched the boy for over 5 years, he had absolutely no idea about the world he had become a part of. Constantly surprised by the accolades placed on him, he shrugged them off and never once complained about his lot in life. She worried that he had known so little about his real family and saw how it hurt him but he grew and matured. She had always felt he had great potential but knew something was holding him back, he refrained from excelling in his classes as if he was afraid to do well. She worried over his incessant ability to find trouble but was always proud when he came through with flying colors even if she didn't show it. During the trial she agonized over all these things trying to find the point in time where he had changed so drastically for the worse. The conclusion seemed to fit when the boy's godfather had died, another innocent man unjustly accused. She believed he had just snapped, that all the emotions she had seen him bottle up overwhelmed the boy and he lashed out. The evidence was overwhelming, his wand had been tested and the blood coating his beaten and unconscious body was that of his relatives. She was still haunted by the visions of that night and the trial afterwards. How could she turn against her own beliefs in what the boy was, he had never before shown anything but respect for others, was always so polite. She could see through the lies now but was it too late? She had failed one of her students and a boy that was closer to her than most, even though she never showed it. How could she make it up to him?

Albus Dumbledore thought he had never made a bad decision. He had always scrutinized every option, every detail especially when it came to Harry Potter. He had thought that all avenues were covered. The boy was in a home that protected him even though he didn't like to return there every summer, he was safe. They had time to prepare

the boy. He regretted leaving him in the muggle world but innately knew it was for the best. He was proud when the boy returned to Hogwarts, he seemed normal and healthy even if he was a little small and skinny for his age. He made a few fast friends even if the rest of the students wavered. Harry had risen to every challenge showing his bravery, courage and above all love for life. His hesitancy in telling the boy about his past and future was only that of a concerned grandfather. Although he was of no relation, he had taken interest in the boy's life, brought him under his wing, tried to mentor him. Was that his mistake? He had tried even harder realizing the power the boy possessed to keep him from turning out like Tom Riddle had and thought he had succeeded until that night. He was devastated when he saw the bodies, Harry had already been removed by the aurors but it was a gruesome scene. Harry's muggle relatives had been brutally beaten and tortured, one could barely tell who they were, and the blood everywhere was overwhelming. Mrs. Figg and Percy had been killed by the killing curse by the boy's wand which was in his hand when they found him. The wand had been immediately seized preventing any further inspection, but he didn't question the motives of the ministry at the time. He ignored the pleading cries from the boy that he was innocent and the decision to sentence him to 5 life terms in Azkaban was overwhelming. The thought that he was the wizarding world's only hope of defeating Voldemort only briefly crossed his mind. They had lost the boy, but they would find another way to survive. He felt betrayed by the boy's actions and was disgusted at his once loving feelings towards him. He would not make the same mistake again. But he already had. He should have seen through the falsehoods. Once priding himself on the fact he knew the boy so well, how could he not see that it was impossible for Harry to kill someone. Harry had fought all his life, fought against the injustice of the world and fought for the innocents that became victims. Now because of this, the boy was lost in more ways than one. They would prove his innocence and the world would know the injustice they inflicted upon Harry Potter a boy who had only known grief and strife his entire life. If only they were in time to bring the boy back from the brink they had pushed him to.

But none of them really understood how far they had gone. They didn't really understand Harry Potter, had never cared enough to push past the façade that was presented and learn the true horrors

his life had been. But they didn't care enough and they left the boy to find his own way through life, through all the physical and emotional abuse, through all the expectations levied on him. They kept the truth from him, they kept information important to his survival from him thinking it all too much for a boy his age to handle, and yet they thought he could handle killing someone and spending the rest of his life in Azkaban. No they really didn't know the real Harry Potter.

Lost in their own thoughts they didn't notice the bare cell when they reached the cellar. They didn't notice at first that the bed was empty of any occupant, there was no sign of life anywhere in the cell.

"Where the hell is he Albus?" Moody was the first to break out of his thoughts and look for the boy.

"What?" They all chorused and their heads snapped up frantically searching the cell before them.

Albus waved his wand attempting to lower the wards but they wouldn't budge. He tried again and again, the others assisting but the wards stayed in place.

"Albus why won't they come down, where is he?" Minerva questioned, her voice shaky and a little too high pitched, showing her fear and concern.

"He can't have left if the wards are still in place, Albus" Arthur commented trying to search out the cell as if someone was just beyond their sight.

"There's no one in there, no invisibility cloak no nothing, it's as if the boy just disappeared from existence."

"It can't be Albus, we must find him." Molly nearly cried out in frustration. She couldn't just get the boy back and loose him again.

"Molly calm down, we will not resolve anything this way. Yes the wards still appear to be in place, and yet somehow he has escaped. He escaped from Azkaban as well, there is something we are missing in all this. We will conduct a thorough examination of the wards in



time, but we must find Harry and get him back to safety. Please form teams and search for him, Arthur and Kingsley you will come with me. I am calling an emergency meeting of the Wizengamot this evening where we will review this evidence and hopefully set things right as soon as possible. Please do not inform anyone else of this until we have it resolved. It is most important that Harry not be found by the ministry or Voldemorts forces at this time, so no one outside this room is to be told, not even the other order members. Is that understood?" He watched as everyone shook their head in agreement. Seeing this acknowledgement he left the basement with Arthur Weasley and Kingsley Shacklebolt in tow.

## Chapter 7—Freedom at Last

“Morning mum.” Ginny called out when she came down to the kitchen the next morning. Her mum looked somehow different today. She was cooking breakfast, but where she was always so attentive to her cooking, today she was distracted. She almost looked like she did when they had learned of Percy’s death. This shocked Ginny to the core, something had happened last night in the order meeting, something big. “Mum, what’s wrong, what happened?” she questioned walking up behind her mother who still hadn’t noticed her presence. She placed a hand on her mother’s shoulders and realized she was shaking.

“MUM?”

“Oh Ginny dear, sit down and I’ll have breakfast for you in a minute.” Was all Molly said and returned to her melancholy state barely watching the food. Ginny lead her to a seat at the table watching her closely. Her mother didn’t resist but when she sat down at the table she nervously fidgeted with her hands like she didn’t know what to do with them. Realizing she wasn’t going to get anything out of her like this, Ginny busied herself with finishing the meal. She had just placed the last dish down on the table when Ron and Hermione came in looking all bright and happy.

“Hey Ginny what’s for breakfast?” Ron asked not really caring for an answer as he sat down and began heaping food onto his plate.

“Ginny?” Hermione asked screwing up her face in that ‘What’s going on’ look she had. Ginny shook her head trying to communicate that this wasn’t the time to talk and shot a glance at her mother.

Hermione caught Ginny’s look and carefully studied Mrs. Weasley. The woman didn’t look good at all, something terrible had surely happened and Hermione was determined to find out what it was. Looking back to Ginny she nodded then sat down by her clueless boyfriend and ate quietly.

Breakfast was a silent affair although tense. Ron shoveled food into his mouth oblivious of anything while Hermione and Ginny ate slowly

watching Mrs. Weasley. Molly continued to stare into space ringing her hands over and over again. Finally finishing Hermione and Ginny got up from the table and waited impatiently for Ron to catch on, they would have to wait forever.

“Ron, come on, you said you would show me some of those new chasers moves you developed this summer.” Ginny said in exasperation when her brother wouldn’t budge. Ron looked up about to question her about this, he hadn’t designed any new plays but when he looked into his sisters eyes he new he better get moving. Shooting a quick glance at Hermione, he saw the same expression mirrored on her face. Eyeing his remaining breakfast longingly one last time he took a sip of pumpkin juice as Hermione hauled on his arm to forcibly remove him from the table.

“What was that all about? Geez can’t a guy finish his breakfast in peace?” Ron asked as soon as they were up in the girls room and the door shut.

“Ron you are so thick!” Hermione sighed plopping herself down on her bed. “Didn’t you see your mum? Something’s going on and I’ll just bet it has something to do with Harry.”

“So it’s Harry again is it? I don’t want to talk about him anymore, he’s already wasted enough of my time this summer as it is.” Ron said turning to leave, anger flushing his face.

“Ron sit down!” Ginny shouted and pulled her brother onto the bed next to her. “This is important, it’s big! Didn’t you notice that there are no order members here?”

“No, what does that got to do with anything?”

Hermione rolled her eyes at Ron and his anger seemed to grow. “Look I’m not dense, I’m just tired of everything being about Harry, good or bad. I wish I never met the bastard!”

“RON!” Hermione scolded.

"You just don't get it do you Ron." Ginny said quietly looking at her hands folded in her lap. "You can't see past anything can you? You're so jealous of him you're blind. He never asked for any of his fame, he hates it. He would trade places with you any day in a heartbeat, but you're so hung up on fame and fortune you never stop to realize the consequences of it all."

"THAT'S NOT IT!" Ron shouted shooting off the bed and rounding on his sister who didn't move. "I HATE HIM. HE BETRAYED ME, US, OUR WHOLE DAMNED FAMILY! HOW CAN YOU EXPECT ME TO FORGIVE HIM? HE'S GOT YOU ALL FOOLED!"

"RON SHUT UP, JUST SHUT UP! I CAN'T TAKE THIS ANYMORE. IF YOU'RE GOING TO BE SUCH AN ARSE ABOUT THIS I DON'T THINK I WANT TO GO OUT WITH YOU ANYMORE!"

"IS THAT RIGHT HERMIONE! THEN FINE, FINE!" Ron shouted throwing up his hands and storming out of the room slamming the door behind him.

Hermione burst into tears and sank back down sobbing into her hands. "What have we done Ginny?"

"We've betrayed a friend and part of our family. I betrayed the man I love! Hermione do you think he can forgive us?"

"I don't know Ginny, I keep thinking that if I was in his position I wouldn't. We hurt him so bad Ginny!"

"I know" Ginny said with a heavy heart. "I think we should go down and see if we can talk to him."

"What!" Hermione said snapping her head up and wiping her tears away. "Do you think that's a good idea? Will he be able to see us through the wards or for that matter even hear us. I'm sure the order put up some pretty strong ones when they created the cell."

"I don't know, but I do know that I have to try. Something happened last night, I'm sure of it! The problem will be getting around mum without her noticing. I just hope she's not in the kitchen any more."

“Let’s go then” Hermione said and they got up and left the room. As they passed Ron’s room they could still hear him ranting and raving but didn’t stop. If he was going to act this way then they would let him, at least they didn’t have to listen to it. The house was eerily quiet as they made their way down the stairs but as they passed the parlor they heard a quiet sobbing noise and assumed it was Mrs. Weasley. Saddened but pleased she was no longer in the kitchen they sped up and nearly ran down the steps to the basement where Harry was being kept. Searching for his figure they were shocked when they realized he was no longer there.

“Well I guess that explains everything!” Ginny said.

“Harry’s escaped again, but where could he go and how did he get out?” Hermione said disbelieving the fact that Harry could have escaped.

“I don’t know Hermione, but I bet that’s also why there are no order members around, they are out looking for Harry.”

“Let’s go see your mum.”

“Harry that was brilliant! Your innocence and Fudge’s guilt in one fell swoop. I just hope they get moving on this. I’d love to see their faces when they have to admit this to the public. I just hope the Ministry won’t fall because of this.”

“Moony, I don’t think it will go that fast.”

“What else do they have to do? You said yourself the Death Eaters haven’t anything planned and probably won’t for at least another month until Voldemorts regains consciousness. What could possibly be more important than getting this tangled mess untangled? We need a new competent minister; they need to clear your name!”

“Yeah, well I guess I’m not over confident in the government these days. Besides I have some more things I want to show you and I have to train. Haven’t had much of a chance for that lately and I don’t want to get complacent. Did I tell you I’m going to be an animagus?”

“Really Harry? I think you left that part out. What form do you have?”

“Sorry, but a lots happened over the past year, and if you forgot it was 4 years in the other realm. So yeah, anyway, it’s forms.”

“What? Are you telling me you have more than one form?” Remus waited for his answer in excitement.

“Yeah, they’re both magical, I think. I was just able to see fuzzy forms before I left. Ones a phoenix and the other is a Dire Wolf.” Harry chuckled seeing the look of amazement on Remus’s face.

“But Harry, that’s.....there’s only been a handful of wizards through the ages that have been magical animagi and then only one form. If you have two then that must mean.....”

“Yeah, I’ve got a lot of power! And do I ever mean a lot!” Harry laughed outright now. Remus’s eyes just about looked like they were going to pop out of his head. “Only thing is I have not practiced the transformations yet. Only got to the basics of how to do them. I mean I know how and all but it takes practice and I haven’t been doing a lot of that lately. I was hoping maybe you could help me?” Harry asked timidly. Harry watched Remus, the man was in a daze and didn’t seem to be coming out of it which worried Harry until a small movement at the corner of his mouth began. Soon a full fledged smirk formed on his lips and his eyes danced merrily as he looked up.

Hopping up from his seat he clapped his hands together and stated, “Let’s get started! No time like the present!”

For the next several days they worked on Harry’s transformations. He was progressing rapidly now that he had the time to commit to it. Every day before breakfast James Roper would go into Hogsmeade to get a copy of the paper, each day hoping that today was the day and each day he was sorely disappointed. They had decided it was better for Harry to go out as James because Remus would draw too much attention. They knew the order was looking for them and they couldn’t risk too many outings, and it fit them just fine. Constant training and studying seemed to work well for both of them. Harry

also secretly hoped that he would have a chance to meet Ginny again while in town but when he saw the closed sign on the door to Weasley Wizarding Wheezes his heart plummeted, his hope was dashed. Oh well, maybe it was for the best. It would be harder trying to pretend he was James around Ginny anyway.

“Concentrate Harry you’re almost there!” Remus said quietly not wanting to break his focus. He had noticed the change almost immediately this morning when they started. Slowly Harry’s arms had elongated and sprouted a thick silvery black fur. Hands had turned into paws and his legs were transformed into the hind legs of a wolf. Harry was breathing heavily laying on his side on the ground trying to concentrate. Remus knew the transformation would be painful, but it would ease the more he practiced until he could do it instantly. Suddenly the half wolf disappeared and a very worn looking Harry lay still on the floor. Remus scooped him up gently and took him up to his room hoping he wouldn’t sleep too long. Laying him on the bed he removed the boy’s shoes and tucked him under the covers. Harry looked so peaceful in sleep, he didn’t look as old and hardened as he did when he was awake. Sleeping he looked like a normal happy 17 year old. Realizing that Harry would not be able to go into the village today he quickly wrote a note explaining where he had gone and placed it on the pillow next to Harry’s head and left.

“Harry! Harry! Wake up! Get your sorry, wonderful arse out of bed! I have good news!” Remus shouted when he got home later that afternoon.

The full Wizengamot was in attendance, resplendent in full purple robes lined with silver. They sat silent staring into the crowd below from a podium looking like royalty. The wizarding public had no idea that the Wizengamot had been holding secret emergency meetings over the last several days that lasted well into the night. It was a stressful time for the old men, some very frail in health but they had more important things to worry about. They could not allow the wizarding world to fall into shambles when the news of what they had learned was announced to the public, so they debated and argued the best way to resolve certain situations. Albus Dumbledore looked the weariest for his time spent in seclusion with the Wizengamot. His eyes had lost their twinkle and his shoulders were stooped forwards.

It was barely perceptible by those that didn't know him well, but worried those that did.

Just this morning the Wizengamot had announced that they would have a special public announcement of great importance to the wizarding community of Great Britain. Such a thing being never heard of before, there was a tremendous crowd forming in the auditorium of the Ministry. Reporters from all over the world had shown up as well as top ministry officials and their families. Ministry workers and friends made it through tight security and also filled the halls. Since this was such a high visibility event, security was at a maximum, almost the full contingent of over 300 aurors lined the halls of the ministry watching closely all those who milled in the crowd. Order members who had known about this announcement earlier also stood in the crowd. A small group of red heads could be seen gathered by the edge of the podium in the front with various expressions written on their faces. The older Weasley's seemed excited while the younger Weasley's were confused along with their friend Hermione Granger.

"I don't know why mum seems to think we need to be here. I hate these kind of things, blimey it's summer holidays and I could be sleeping in or playing Quidditch."

"Ron shut up, I'm tired of your complaining and no one really wants to hear it anymore. Find someone who cares!" Ginny said angrily and walked over to Bill.

"MAY I HAVE YOUR ATTENTION PLEASE?" The noise simmered down as the voice spoke out above the crowd. It was like a wave, the people in front nudging those behind to quiet until a pin drop could be heard.

"MAY I PRESENT ALBUS DUMBLEDORE SUPREME MUGWAMP OF THE COUNCIL OF WIZENGAMOT WITH A SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT."

Dumbledore slowly got to his feet and approached the front of the makeshift stage. Touching his wand to his throat he cast 'Sonic' so he could be heard by all.



“SEVERAL DAYS AGO A DEATH EATER RAID WAS CONDUCTED ON THE MINISTRY---he paused for quiet to resume from the many gasps in the audience---IT SEEMS THAT THE TARGET OF THIS RAID WAS NOT A PERSON OR PERSONS BUT SOME VERY IMPORTANT SECRET DOCUMENTS. I AM PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE THAT THE DEATH EATERS WERE APPREHENDED AND THE DOCUMENTS RECOVERED.---clapping rang through the hall, but there were many a confused face----THE INFORMATION THAT WAS CONTAINED IN THESE DOCUMENTS WAS NOT PROPERLY DIVULGED TO THE PROPER AUTHORITIES AT A TIME WHEN THEY WERE MOST NEEDED AND THIS IS WHAT THE COUNCIL HAS BEEN DELIBERATING OVER FOR THE PAST WEEK—more mumbles within the crowd---IT SEEMS THAT A GREAT INJUSTICE HAS BEEN DONE TO A MAN THAT WAS INNOCENT AND THE EVIDENCE HIDDEN AWAY. I SPEAK ONLY OF ONE HARRY JAMES POTTER---again Dumbledore paused as gasps and shouting reigned, some shouted in anger and disbelief while others sobbed and broke down, Dumbledore let them have their moment. After several minutes of pandemonium the aurors had to step in to hold people back from surging forward and Dumbledore shot loud crackling fireworks into the air from his wand to regain control. When it didn't work he nodded to the aurors who as a body repeated the gesture. The result was deafening and blinding, wizards and witches clasped their hands over their ears and clenched their eyes shut. The room was silent once again. IF I MAY CONTINUE? IT SEEMS THAT 6 DEATH EATERS GAVE TESTIMONY AND WERE INTERROGATED UNDER VERITASERUM STATING THAT HARRY POTTER WAS FRAMED BY VOLDEMORT FOR THE DEATHS HE WAS ACCUSED OF. THE EVIDENCE IS VERY SPECIFIC AND CORROBORATED BY EACH OF THEIR TESTIMONIES.—he held up a hand staving off the questions of the reporters until later---WE ALSO HAVE EYE WITNESS ACCOUNTS OF DEATH EATERS SURROUNDING PRIVET DRIVE WHERE MR. POTTER RESIDED AT THE TIME FROM THE DURSLEY'S NEIGHBORS WHO HAD BEEN OBLIVIATED BY CERTAIN MINISTRY OFFICIALS AFTER THEIR STATEMENTS WERE MADE. IT SEEMS THAT MR. POTTER WAS TRICKED INTO LEAVING HIS HOUSE BY A TRUSTED AGENT, NONE OTHER THAN A MR. PERCIVAL ARTHUR WEASLEY, WHO IT SEEMS WAS A CONFIRMED DEATH

EATER HIMSELF.---more gasps and questions filled the room, All the Weasley's slumped their heads in shame, all except Ron who tried to shout above the rest of the crowd that it wasn't true to no avail. Arthur put a hand on his sons shoulder to quiet him.

"Ron, be quiet son" Arthur said softly.

"But dad it's not true, you can't let them lie about Percy! It's not true, you can't believe that!" Ron shouted, but he saw the pain and guilt in his father's eyes and couldn't believe it.

"I saw the evidence Ron, the Death Eaters gloated about the operation in the files, they even had pictures, the Dark Mark was on Percy's body, another picture was taken by the ministry and was covered up it also shows the Dark Mark on Percy's arm. I am afraid the ministry was more worried about getting Harry out of the way than the truth and justice of the situation. Be quiet and listen Ron there is more to be heard."

Once again the aurors had to shoot sparks into the air to regain control. PLEASE IF EVERYONE WOULD REMAIN CALM WE CAN GET THROUGH THE REST OF THIS ORDEAL AND YOU WILL HAVE YOUR ANSWERS. MR. POTTER WAS LURED OUT OF HIS HOME AND WAS BEATEN AND TORTURED TO GIVE UP INFORMATION ONLY HE HAD, WHEN HE WOULDN'T BREAK HE WAS FORCED TO WATCH HIS RELATIVES TORTURED TO DEATH IN AN ATTEMPT TO GET THE INFORMATION. WHEN THEY WERE DEAD THEY TURNED ON PERCY, THEY USED MR. POTTER'S WAND TO CAST THE KILLING CURSE ON MR. WEASLEY. THEY WERE ABOUT TO LEAVE WHEN MRS. ARABELLA FIGG A SQUIB WHO LIVED A FEW STREETS FROM THE DURSLEY'S CAME TO INVESTIGATE THE LOUD NOISES AND OBVIOUS USE OF MAGIC. SHE WAS IMMEDIATELY STRUCK DOWN, ONCE AGAIN WITH MR. POTTER'S WAND. THEY DRAGGED THE BODIES INTO THE HOUSE, BEAT MR. POTTER INTO UNCONSCIOUSNESS THEN COVERED HIM WITH THE BLOOD OF HIS RELATIVES AND PLACED HIS WAND BACK INTO HIS HAND. IN OUR CARELESSNESS IN INVESTIGATING THE SCENE, THE MINISTRY DID NOT EVEN NOTICE THE FACT THAT HIS WAND WAS NOT EVEN PLACED INTO MR. POTTER'S

CORRECT HAND. THE MINISTRY WAS LATE IN ARRIVING ON THE SCENE ALLOWING THE DEATH EATERS PLENTY OF TIME TO CLEAN THE AREA OF ANY SIGN OF THEIR PRESENCE. THE REST YOU KNOW. BUT THERE IS ANOTHER MATTER THAT MUST BE ADDRESSED BEFORE WE END. THE MINISTER OF MAGIC CORNELIUS FUDGE HAS BEEN CHARGED WITH AND FOUND GUILTY OF EMBEZZLEMENT, MISUSE OF MINISTRY RESOURCES, ABUSE OF POWER, AND TREASON AGAINST THE WIZARDING COMMUNITY OF GREAT BRITAIN. EVIDENCE DISCOVERED IN THE FILES ALONG WITH THAT OF MR. POTTERS INNOCENCE, SHOWS MR. FUDGE ACCEPTING BRIBES FROM KNOWN DEATH EATERS TO MISGUIDE AND MISDIRECT THE PUBLIC AWAY FROM THE KNOWLEDGE OF VOLDEMORTS RETURN. IT ALSO DETAILS HIS AUTHORIZATION TO SEND TWO DEMENTORS TO ATTACK MR. POTTER AT HIS HOME TWO YEARS AGO, I'M SURE ALL OF YOU REMEMBER THE MISCARRIAGE OF JUSTICE THAT BROUGHT ABOUT. THERE IS NUMEROUS EVIDENCE OF FORMER MINISTER FUDGE ASSISTING VOLDEMORTS SUPPORTERS WITH MONEY AND RESOURCES THAT SHOULD HAVE GONE TO FIGHTING THEM. THE LIST IS LONG AND TEDIOUS BUT WILL BE MADE PUBLIC THIS DAY. PAMPHLETS HAVE BEEN PREPARED AND WILL BE AVAILABLE TO YOU AT THE DOORS WHEN YOU LEAVE. CORNELIUS OSWALD FUDGE HAS THEREFORE BEEN STRIPPED OF ALL TITLES, HONORS AND PRIVILEGES AND SENTENCED TO A LIFE TERM IN THE WIZARD PRISON OF AZKABAN WITHOUT POSSIBILITY OF PAROLE. MR. HARRY JAMES POTTER HAS BEEN FOUND INNOCENT AND IS ABSOLVED OF ALL THE SENTENCES PASSED ON HIM AND ORDERED RELEASED FROM THE WIZARD PRISON OF AZKABAN, WITH REMUNERATIONS FROM THE MINISTRY OF 1,000,000 GALLEONS TO PAID TO HIS PERSONAL VAULTS. ALL CONFISCATED PROPERTY OR MONIES WILL BE RETURNED IMMEDIATELY. WE WILL HAVE AN EMERGENCY RE-ELECTION FOR MINISTER OF MAGIC BY THE HEAD OF EACH MINISTRY DEPARTMENT LATER IN THE WEEK. THAT IS ALL.

Once again Albus Dumbledore raised his wand to his throat and spoke the counter spell to return his voice to normal. Amid the questions and accusations being shouted he made his way off the

back of the podiums with the other council members to a secluded room and sank into a chair and promptly fell asleep.

"I can't believe it!" Ron repeated over and over again, until finally Molly had had enough and placed a silencing spell on the boy, even though Ron didn't even notice it.

The Weasley's and the rest of the order met up in front of the floo network to make their way back to Grimmauld place. Arthur told Ginny to go first. She grabbed a handful of floo powder and threw it into the flames and said "Number 12 Grimmauld Place" the fire flashed green and she disappeared. Hermione was to go next, but just as she stepped forward to enter the fireplace, Ginny came tumbling back out.

"Ginny!" Mrs. Weasley shouted in concern kneeling down next to her bewildered daughter. "What happened?"

"I don't know mum, the fire just spit me back out"

"I'm getting Dumbledore, you all stay put." Arthur said now extremely worried. He hurried off to the room where he had seen the Wizengamot members disappear, but was stopped outside the door by two aurors.

"I'm sorry sir, but you cannot go in."

"I need to speak with Albus Dumbledore it is an extreme emergency."

"I'm sorry sir, but we were told that interruptions would not be tolerated."

"But I must speak with him!"

"I'm sorry sir but we...."

"What's all the racket out here about?" an extremely agitated old wizard snapped poking his head out the door.

"I'm sorry sir, but this gentleman insists on seeing Albus Dumbledore and will not leave."

"Is that so," the old man said looking Arthur Weasley up and down. "You're Arthur Weasley aren't you, head of Misuse of Muggle Artifacts Office?"

"Yes sir, please it is of great importance I speak with Albus right away."

"Keep you knickers on boy, I'll go get him."

Arthur breathed a sigh of relief as the door closed. He didn't have to wait too long and soon it reopened and Albus came striding out looking worried. "What is it Arthur?"

"Not here Albus, we need somewhere private to talk" Arthur whispered.

"Follow me then" Albus led Arthur down another hallway and into a small quiet study which must have been attached to the council chambers. "Now Arthur what has got you so worked up?"

"Albus we can't get back to headquarters! The floo just spat Ginny back. I'm worried Albus what could be happening."

"Has anyone apparated to the sight?"

"No I didn't want anyone to go alone, we don't know what we'll find. Do you think the Death Eaters could have found it."

"Although possible, I believe it very unlikely. Let's go, we will investigate this matter, can you have Molly take the children back to the Burrow?"

"Of course but ...."

"We'll worry about that later."

They soon found everyone else and told them of the plan. Hermione, Ginny and Ron were anything but pleased to hear they were going back to the Burrow. Hermione was more concerned about her books than anything else, but they all conceded defeat and headed back sullenly with Mrs. Weasley following them. The remaining order members apparated to the street outside of Grimmauld Place. What they saw unnerved them all. Laying strewn about having obviously been thrown out the house were several trunks, mounds of clothes, books and numerous other items. Upon further inspection the items were those things that belonged to the order members and teens who had been staying in the house. Dumbledore looked confused which disturbed the others even more.

“Albus?” Minerva squeaked.

“Can anyone see the house?” he asked breathing deeply.

“What’s going on, where is the bloody house?” Moody swore kicking a pile of clothes with his peg leg.

“It’s impossible,” Albus whispered. Everyone stopped and stared dumbly at the old headmaster.

Unbeknownst to anyone Harry and Remus watched transfixed as Albus Dumbledore made the proclamation. Harry hadn’t known what to expect but it certainly wasn’t what Dumbledore had spouted. Knowing the information in the documents would set him free, he was surprised at the copious amounts and how desperately Cornelius Fudge had wanted him out of the way. Surely the Wizengamot would know all the information but he didn’t expect so much too be revealed about that night, some of it was intensely personal. Slightly angered that they had said he was ‘tortured and beaten’ he stood glumly, arms folded across his chest in defiance. He dared any in the crowd to question him and then remembered that no one could see him. Casting a furtive glance at his friend he was relieved to see the same look of defiance in the older mans eyes. Then without pause it was over. The crowd was in a daze but only for a second. Masses of people swarmed the exits and were caught in a bottleneck. Shouting rose in volume as reporters and the public fought to get at the documents the Wizengamot had promised them. Harry and Remus

watched unmoving. After several long tense minutes the crowd slowly dissipated. Aurors remained on guard while others used the floo network to leave.

Harry's attention was caught by a group of red heads. Feeling excitement grow within him he nudged Remus and juted his chin towards the clan of Weasley's. Walking forward he found a position with a good view to watch their reactions. The order was in for a big surprise and both Harry and Remus were going to be there to watch. Grimacing slightly that Ginny was the first to go and thereby reveal the surprise he was soon caught up in his own laughter when she was unceremoniously spat out of the fireplace. Remus was also laughing although not as intensely as Harry. Arthur strode off purposefully while the rest of the members stood around nervously eyeing the fireplace. Feeling deprived of his prank he turned to Remus.

"Well that didn't turn out as good as I expected."

"Yeah, I was kind of hoping to see more of them getting kicked out of the fire."

"Well, now that that's ruined, what say you to a visit to our most esteemed ex-minister."

"Why I would love to Harry."

They strode purposefully and unseen down to the detainment cells the ministry had created for the death eaters and found the one containing Cornelius Fudge.

"Doesn't look too happy being all caged up does he?" Remus asked as he watched Fudge pace back and forth in his small cell.

"No he doesn't. Wonder how he's been holding up?" Harry said before disappearing then re-appearing within the cell. Remus rolled his eyes at Harry's flare for dramatics but didn't have the heart to stop the boy.

“How you holding up there ex-minister?” Harry sneered before revealing himself.

“Who’s Who’s there?” Cornelius shouted into the cell.

Harry who was standing behind the minister reached out and playfully tapped the man’s shoulder. Cornelius spun around raising his wand arm. Harry looked down at the arm with eyebrow raised.

“Now what could you possibly do with that?” Harry asked scornfully.

“P-P-POTTER!”

“You guessed it. Let’s see, what should be your prize. Oh yes I forgot. You ex-minister Fudge have been awarded a life time sentence to the beautiful secluded, Dementor free island of Azkaban.” Harry watched Fudge splutter like a fish out of water. “What? Nothing to say for such a well earned reward?”

“Y-Y—ou I will not believe it. How dare you presume...”

“I presume nothing Fudge” Harry said darkly, turning very serious he leaned forward menacingly until he was only a few inches away from the mans face. “Everything you received you have more than earned. Finally some justice is being done, and the public will be free of your idiocy. You never cared one iota that the people were in danger, you only cared about yourself. Well you will have a lifetime to contemplate that! When... or I should say if you ever get out, you will be nothing.” Standing straight and turning his back at the former minister Harry made to move towards the door and then stopped and turned around again. “Have a nice life Cornelius” he said and mock bowed before disappearing.

Cornelius frantically ran at the door to his cell beating on it in an attempt to open it, of course it wouldn’t budge. His voice continued to rise in panic and was soon sobbing loudly. “I’m the minister of magic, you can’t do this to me.” He continued crying over and over until Kingsley Shacklebolt, Tonks and several other aurors came to escort him away.



“Quite fitting don’t you think?”

“Harry sometimes you are just a little scary, you know that?”

“Overdramatic maybe, but scary? Nah!”

“So you realized that about yourself did you? Thought I might have to be the one to point it out to you.”

“Well Sirius was the one to tell me I wasn’t having much fun in my life, so I decided to make a change.” Harry shrugged.

“Well I know you’re cooking up a lot in that big head of yours. What’s next on the list?”

“Haven’t figured that one out yet. I figure I have one more month of uninterrupted training time so I’m going to make use of that.”

“Don’t you want to see your friends?” Remus asked not sure how Harry would respond.

“You’re my only friend Moony!”

“Oh I can think of a certain pretty red-head that would like to be your friend.”

If looks could kill, Remus thought he’d surely be dead when Harry spun around and shot him a glare.

“Harry we have to discuss this sometime. At some point you are going to have to confront them and get everything out in the open.”

“Oh I will Moony, I will. I think I will have to make a visit to Albus soon. What do you think about teaching again?”

“What?” Remus was surprised by the change in topic and he was the one to now stop in his tracks. “Harry I can’t teach, remember what happened after your third year?”

“Oh I think that’s going to change Moony. Would you like to teach again?”

“Of course I would but that’s not the point!”

“Sure it is, I couldn’t have just anyone teaching me defense against the dark arts now could I?”

“Harry there’s not much I can teach you now, you’re way beyond any wizard. Does that mean you intend to go back to school?”

“Oh I’ve thought about it. What would I do for the rest of my life without N.E.W.T. exam results. Seems almost a shame really.” He said sarcastically.

“What are you rambling about Harry? You could pass those N.E.W.T.’s with ease right now.”

“I know that and you know that but no one else knows it, and it wouldn’t serve my purpose. Besides, without my NEWTs I wouldn’t be able to get a job in a year now would I?” he said sarcastically.

“Harry you’re doing it again. I don’t think you’ll have any problems what-so-ever.”

“I know, but have to follow the rules now don’t we?”

“I think I need a drink! I know you’re cooking something up in there.” Remus said pointing to Harry’s head.

“Where should we go first? I’m thinking something small and out of the way, who could use the publicity Moony?”

“Why don’t we just go to the Three Broomsticks, there probably won’t be too many people milling about there.”

“Just what I was thinking, won’t Madame Rosmerta be surprised to see me.”

“Harry you know she didn’t believe you were guilty.”

“Yeah but it will still be fun to see her again, at least as myself anyway. Let’s go.”

Remus placed a hand on Harry’s shoulder and Harry apparated them out of the ministry undetected to an alley besides the Three Broomsticks. Suddenly Harry felt nervous and vulnerable.

“Don’t worry Harry, it will be okay.” Remus said when he noticed Harry’s uncertainty.

“Right”

However once again they were caught off guard by the amount of people packed into the Three Broomsticks. The noise overwhelmed them as they opened the door to enter. Harry was frozen until Remus gave him a small push. Immediately the noise level fell as everyone turned to see who had just entered and were dumbstruck at the sight.

Harry smiled weakly as his eyes rove over the people in the pub. It was packed, not a seat left untended. Harry turned to leave when Remus grabbed his arm.

“I believe there are a couple seats in the back Harry” he whispered to the shaking teen.

“Moony I think we should go” Harry said through clenched teeth.

“Oh Mr. Lupin and Mr. Potter, how nice to see you” a pleasant voice drifted to their ears. Pushing through the crowd, Madame Rosmerta finally came to a stop in front of them.

“I have a table right over here for you. If you would follow me please?”

Harry felt trapped, all he could think of was getting out of there but Remus had a firm grasp on his arm. Thinking about just apparating away he was cut off from the thought.

“Don’t even think about it Harry. Where’s the fun in that?” Remus said tightly although planting a false smile on his face.

Harry gulped audibly and steeled himself. Following Remus they soon found Madame Rosmerta waiting by a freshly cleaned booth. They took seats across from each other, Harry staring nervously down at the table.

“What can I get you two gents?” Rosmerta asked kindly.

“How about two specials and two firewhiskey’s”

“Well, for this occasion why not.” And she walked off into the kitchens.

“Harry, everything is going to be fine, you’ll see. You just have to get use to being out in the public again. I thought you were tired of hiding behind James.”

“Yeah, well I thought I was too, but this is just too weird. Everyone is staring at me Moony!”

“Well they did that before. I thought you would be used to it by now.”

Harry ran his hands through his hair and covered his face resting his elbows on the table. “You’re right, I’m sorry I’m acting like a bloody fool.”

“Enjoy yourself Harry, you’re free now.”

“Here we are” Madame Rosmerta had returned with a tray laden with three shot glasses and a bottle of Firewhiskey which she sat on the table. After pouring three drinks she spoke loudly.

“To Harry Potter!” Harry winced as the toast chorused through the pub. He removed his hands and grabbed his drink downing it before looking around. He was surprised when he saw the smiles on the faces looking back at him. Remus poured another round and Harry downed it quickly. “Thanks Madame Rosmerta, but I didn’t need that”

“Call me Rosey Mr. Potter, and I do believe you did need that. And whatever you need is on the house!”

“It’s Harry okay?”

She nodded and left to return to business. Before he could down another drink the inhabitants of the pub surged forward expressing their apologies and well wishes. Some even attempted to pat him on the back which surprised Harry and he shrank away from them. He tried to smile back but was quickly becoming irritated by the throngs of people that seemed never ending. He looked over to Remus silently pleading for help but became even more irritated by the smug look on his friends face. “Moony you’re not helping this.” He stated angrily.

“Just relax Harry” was all he got in return. Harry sighed and tried to smile back to his well wishers and was finally relieved when Rosey had returned with their dinners. She shooed everyone back to their tables and they were finally given some peace and quiet. They ate in silence, Harry had never been so glad for it until now. After another shot of Firewhiskey he started to relax. It was late into the evening and he had just finished off a wonderful treacle tart when it happened. This was the last thing Harry was prepared for.

The door to the pub slammed opened and everyone spun in their seats to see the cause of the disturbance. In walked his worst nightmare, no he wasn’t ready for this yet and cast a fearful glance at Remus who also seemed to be dreading the encounter.

“HARRY!”

With that chaos reigned. All eyes once again snapped toward him and a bushy brown girl with four red heads came bounding towards him. His heart was caught in his chest and it became difficult to breath. They were almost upon him, he felt like a caged animal desperately seeking an escape route.

Before he could react they came to a stop in front of their table. Taking a deep breath he met their eyes, eyes that spoke volumes,

regret, guilt, fear, love. At the last emotion he saw swimming in their eyes he braced himself. How dare they!

"Harry, we're so sorry, we didn't know, please Harry say something." Hermione pleaded.

Harry stared at them for a moment wrestling with his confused feelings. He wanted to hug them and let them back into his life but then the memories of the trial surfaced and he raged at their treatment of him. Not trusting himself he remained still.

"Granger, Weasley's" he got out although no one could miss the dripping sarcasm in his tone. He shot back another glass of Firewhiskey to the surprise of the teens present.

Remus shot a worried glance at Harry. He didn't know how to get out of this situation, they seemed trapped and he could literally feel the anger pouring off Harry. Harry noticed Remus' glance but ignored it and downed another Firewhiskey.

"Harry we need to talk to you." Ginny's soft voice spoke up from between her brothers.

Harry closed his eyes fighting off the urge to let them in, to be with her.

"I can't.....talk...now!" Harry ground out.

"Please mate, we're really sorry" Ron said taking a step forward.

At this Harry lost it, He stood up abruptly and faced them. "I AM NOT YOU'RE MATE. FRIENDS DON'T TURN THEIR BACKS ON EACH OTHER. THEY DON'T LET EACH OTHER ROT IN A HELL HOLE FOR A YEAR WITHOUT VISITING! THEY BLOODY WELL DON'T HURT EACH OTHER LIKE YOU HAVE DONE!" Harry raged and without another word he was gone.

"Where did he go?" Ginny asked looking around the pub.

"He's not supposed to be able apparate, he's doesn't even have a license, oh I hope he doesn't get into trouble with the ministry. He's just only been freed." Hermione muttered anxiously.

"That I believe is the least of his problems." Moony said and he too disappeared leaving the frantic group behind.

"Shit!" Ron shouted and steeling a mannerism from Harry he ran a hand through his hair.

"I don't believe the man wants to talk to us," said George dejectedly.

"I do believe your right on the mark brother dear." Fred agreed.

"Why doesn't he want to talk to us?" Ron asked in anger.

Ginny rolled her eyes. "Would you want to talk to us if we had sent you to prison even though you were innocent? Sometimes Ron you amaze me. Can't you use that brain of yours for more than just keeping your ears apart? Besides you're the one that has been ranting about his guilt even when we first found out he was innocent."

Not knowing what else to do they sank into the booth recently vacated by Harry and Remus. Ginny could feel the heat that still remained on the seat from Harry and closed her eyes longing for things to be back to normal. Reminding herself that nothing was ever normal when it came to Harry Potter she reluctantly returned her attention to her family

## Chapter 8—Encounters and Exams

When Remus returned from the pub shortly after Harry he wasn't surprised when he found Harry pacing and drinking straight from a bottle of alcohol.

"You know that stuff is going to rot your insides?" He asked in an attempt to get Harry to put the bottle down. He had been drinking more and more lately and knew it wasn't a good sign.

"I know, but I just can't get past these thoughts. Occlumency just doesn't seem to be working for me."

"Harry nothing can drown out your feelings, not even occlumency. You have to deal with them first."

"I can't," Harry said sadly taking another sip from the bottle.

"You have to Harry or it's going to eat you alive."

Harry fake shivered. "What a nasty thought, to be eaten alive" Harry joked.

"Harry, enough of the sarcasm, you need to talk about this. It's the only way you're going to get past it."

"Moony, I'm so bloody tired of hearing that you know. Why does everyone have to know how I feel? No one cared before! Why now?"

"Look what it's doing to you. You don't have to go around shouting it from the rooftops, but you need to tell someone or you're going to burst."

"I know you're right." Harry felt defeated and slumped into a chair dropping the now empty bottle to the floor. "It's just hard, every time I see them it's like my heart stops and I can't breathe. They make it seem so easy to go back to the way things used to be, but that's a lie. It's not like that anymore, it can't be."



“Nothing will ever be like it was before Harry. Too many things have happened, we’ve all changed, but you need to accept that and go on.”

“I have accepted it Moony. I don’t think they have. They don’t understand what I’ve been through, can’t really unless you’re going through it. It just makes me mad. What do they think that I’ll just give in? ‘Sorry to have put you through hell mate but can we be friends again?’ What’s he thinking anyway?”

“He’s not Harry, he has a loving family that would forgive him almost any indiscretion, he’s had you there to protect him when you all got into trouble. He’s never really had to do anything on his own. But that doesn’t mean he doesn’t still care Harry. Give him a chance.”

“I think the others I might be able too Moony, but even when he was told by Dumbledore that I was innocent he still thought I was guilty. Why did he only change his mind after the Wizengamot cleared me? He was supposed to be my friend Moony!” Harry said tears streaming down his eyes. “Friends are supposed to know each other, I mean really know. He should’ve known that I wouldn’t kill his brother, Mrs. Figg or my relatives. Merlin’s beard Moony why didn’t he know? Hermione isn’t much better, all her bookish knowledge, she couldn’t find anything in a book for this case so she just threw in with the rest of them. She should’ve at least looked into a goddamn book to try to work out a defense case on evidence or proper trials. She put more time into freeing Buckbeak than me. More time in to gaining house elves their freedom than freeing me. Dammit Moony, they’re fricking animals, was I lower than that, didn’t I deserve at least half the effort she put into their cases. But no, I was the fricking Boy-Who-Lived-and-betrayed! No one helped me, no one cared!” Harry spoke quietly but the immense pain was there in his eyes and his tone.

“I cared Harry.” Remus spoke quietly.

“I know you did Moony, but you’re the only one!” Harry jumped out of his chair looking for another bottle. Not realizing how drunk he was he stumbled over the carpet and fell to the ground. Frustrated he pounded a fist into the ground and couldn’t hold back. He was crying uncontrollably. Remus looked upon the sorry state and got up to

kneel down by the sobbing man. Harry didn't react, he was consumed by his emotions and Remus knew nothing he would say could help the boy so he just cradled Harry against his chest and let the boy cry rocking him back and forth, tears of his own falling quietly down his face. Remus didn't know how long they sat there on the floor crying but he knew it was late. Carefully brushing hair off the boy's face he realized Harry had fallen asleep at some point and was startled. "I guess we both needed that huh Harry?" He said quietly and scooping the sleeping boy into his arms took him upstairs to bed.

Several days passed and Harry and Remus remained secluded in their home practicing and reading. Harry had been able to transform into his Dire Wolf and was now working on his Phoenix. Harry promised that the night of the Full Moon coming up he would transform with Remus and they could go exploring together. Remus was reluctant but Harry's argument about his father's doing it overrode his worry. As a Dire Wolf Harry would be larger than Remus's werewolf form and a lot stronger, so there shouldn't be anything to worry about. While Harry meditated Remus worked in the greenhouse or read.

Nothing more had been said about that night after the Three Broomsticks. Harry seemed to be getting over it and had cut back significantly on his drinking. Progress grew with his Phoenix transformation and soon the night of the Full Moon was upon them. Remus was nervous, not only because of Harry going out into the Forbidden Forest with him but also about what the future would bring.

The night was warm and clear, the moon's orb shining bright in the sky casting luminous silver strands over the forest. Harry was excited; tonight he would roam free with his friend. He liked his Dire Wolf and instinctively knew the powers he possessed. He changed quickly waiting for Remus to transform, when he did the two stood looking at each other warily. Remus snarled and Harry returned the gesture. Remus launched himself at Harry and Harry reared up on his hind legs launching himself back at Remus. They met midair and fell to the ground rolling, snarling each one trying to gain the advantage. It wasn't long before Harry's innate strength countered Remus and he had the werewolf's neck within his enormous jaws. Remus let out a little whimper and after a quick shake of his head still holding Remus,

Harry let go. Remus cowered with his tail tucked between his legs when Harry laid his ears flat against the back of his head. With one last look at Remus, Harry shot off into the forest like the wind. Remus soon followed and they spent the night romping through the forest. It was beautiful to Harry seeing the forest through the eyes of his wolf.

He could smell things he never had before and see long distances startlingly clear. His large form, almost as big as a small horse, elegantly glided over the underbrush and under the trees of the forest. His black thick fur with streaks of silver shimmered reflecting the light of the moon and kept him warm and safe, his fur also had the strange quality of acting like armor. His eyes, although remaining emerald green, radiated like a fire burned in them flickering and flashing, a small but distinct silver lightening bolt shaped patch of fur covered his chest. Elated by this sense of freedom he was reluctant to head back when the dawn started to approach. Remus was trotting to the edge of the forest expectantly and turned his head back over his shoulders every once in awhile to make sure Harry was following.

As they reached the house the first rays of the sun spilled over the horizon with splashes of orange, and yellow. It was a magnificent sight and Harry was entranced by its beauty. Sitting down on his haunches he stared up into the sky bathing in the warmth the light offered. He felt it caress his coat and seep into him filling him with a calm he had rarely known. Turning his head he saw that Remus had transformed back into a human and was sitting next to him also watching the miracle of light. Harry lay down and rested his enormous head on Remus's lap and they sat there until the sun had risen high into the sky.

Remus laid a hand on Harry's back and stroked the black and silver streaked fur, this was peaceful. Never before had he experienced such a feeling. He dreaded to end it but they had things to do today.

"Harry I have to talk to you before we go." Remus said uncertainly.

"What is it Moony, why the frown?"

"Well Harry, first you have to promise you won't get mad."

“What have you done?” Harry said feeling the anger start to rise within him.

“Harry, it’s my fault and no one else’s. Remember when you mentioned going back to Hogwarts? Well I had a talk with Dumbledore about it. I wasn’t trying to push you or anything but I wanted to help grease the wheels so to speak.”

“Please tell me you didn’t”

“I’m afraid I did Harry. I’ll let him if you don’t want to go?” Remus whispered dispiritedly.

“No, I’ll go, but I won’t promise anything. You he has a way of spurting out the wrong thing.”

Remus chuckled and the sound lightened Harry’s heart a little. “I know Harry I know.”

“Moony, who’s going to be there? Is it just Dumbledore?” Harry asked rubbing his face.

“Well you see Harry, that’s the problem. Somehow the Weasley’s found out about the meeting and then a few more.”

“Who?” Harry said exasperatedly.

“Well the Weasley’s-all of them, Hermione, Dumbledore, Minerva, Mad-eye, Kingsley, Hagrid, and oh Tonks too.”

“You like Tonks don’t you.” Harry stated.

“What brought that on?”

“Just answer the question.”

“Well yes, sort of, but nothing could ever happen because well....”

“Don’t start that again Moony. You know you should follow your own advice sometimes.” Harry said cryptically.

“Well....Let’s go, they’ll be waiting.”

“Yeah, okay. But remember I didn’t promise you anything.”

The trek down to the Three Broomsticks seemed to take an eternity and Harry was focused internally, trying to sort through the feelings he had been dealing with over the last week. They weren’t all gone but he was coping better. A small part of him wanted to see his former friends again, a very small part.

Soon they were standing in front of the pub. With a mix of emotions swirling through him, Harry took a deep breath and glanced at Moony. “Let’s get done with this shall we?”

Remus unsure how to respond, smiled slightly and pushed the doors to the pub open. Remus tried to move him into the room but he was unsuccessful. Harry stood rooted to the ground unmovable and remarkably his face was void of emotion, except, that is, in his eyes, they were alive with a mixture of emotions fighting for dominance. The crowd before them sat solemnly unsure of how to react. Mrs. Weasley stood and started to walk towards them. As if that was a signal, the rest of them stood and followed.

Harry raised his hand palm out effectively stopping their forward movement. Opening his mouth to speak he found he couldn’t. He was angered by their pretentiousness in thinking everything they had said and done to him could be forgotten so easily. This feeling warred with wanting to have his family and friends back. Remembering what his parents and Sirius had said to him in the other realm he sighed heavily and once again looked around the pub. Knowing he would have to make a start somewhere he reasoned this was as good a time as any.

He was caught off guard when he was enveloped in a bone crushing hug from Molly Weasley. He didn’t feel the warmth of the hug like he used to but he wasn’t angered by it, he only felt numb and didn’t respond. Sensing this Molly released him and stood back drying the tears from her eyes.

“Harry, you have grown quite a bit. You don’t look anything like you did at Grim.....well you look healthy.” She said really taking in his appearance for the first time.

“Yes Mrs. Weasley I have.” Harry stated looking at her blankly.

Encouraged by Mrs. Weasley’s actions the rest came forward to greet him, no one missing the hollowness in the young man’s eyes. No one knew how to respond until Remus led the dazed man to a seat.

Remus of course realized Harry was blocking the tornado of emotions whipping through him and taking an arm led him quietly to a seat at one of the tables. He sat down quietly still confused. Ginny took a seat next to him while Remus sat on his other side. He looked at her and drank in the smile she gave him. Not saying anything Harry was relieved not to have to make small talk, he didn’t know what to say. Feeling the tension in the room build, Dumbledore stood to address the group.

“Harry, may I be the first to wish you a long happy life, and also offer my profound apologies for the mistakes I have made in concern to you. I know this is difficult for you Harry and it will be a long time before I will be able to regain your trust and friendship, but I am willing to wait until you are ready.”

Harry only cocked his head in acknowledgement. He was angry at the headmaster yes, but he didn’t know how to take the apology. He knew that the man was sincere but he wasn’t ready to accept it at face value, no they would have to earn his trust again and it wouldn’t be easy. He didn’t hear the apologies that all the others felt necessary to make. He just wished they would get down to business.

“Harry?” a soft voice beside him muttered.

“Hmmm?”

“Harry? What are you thinking?” Ginny whispered into his ear. Her warm breath cascaded across his exposed neck sending shivers running down his spine.

“Oh, nothing really. I guess I should say something since everyone else has.”

“Well yes, but you seem to have tuned us all out.”

Harry cracked a slight smile and stood quietly and immediately garnered all their attentions.

“I really don’t know what to say,” he began quietly and unsure. “I am not really sure about all of this yet. I came to discuss some issues with Professor Dumbledore and learned just recently that you would all be here. I appreciate what you are trying to do but at the same time cannot help but wonder about the reasoning behind it all. It’s just a little overwhelming right now. I don’t know where to begin again. I need time to come to terms with this. I am sure you realize I am not the same person I was a year ago, I cannot forget what has happened. I can only hope with time I will be able to move on. With that said, Professor Dumbledore, I will be attending my last year at Hogwarts, but I will warn you now that my life is my own and any attempts by you or the Order to control or manipulate me will have severe consequences. I will sit any exams you deem necessary for me to resume a seventh year schedule and take my NEWTS this year with the rest of my classmates.” Harry stopped to wait for the old mans response.

“Harry I will arrange everything as you wish. Would you be available say in a week’s time to sit the exams?”

“I will be in the Great Hall first thing next Monday. Now until then I ask you all to leave me to myself, I am well taken care of and no one can find me. I think you all have failed in your many attempts so I see no reason why Voldemort would be able to.” Instead of feeling angry at the audible gasps at the name of the Dark Lord, he had to stifle a chuckle.

“Will you stay and have lunch with us Harry?” Ginny ventured nervously.

Harry nodded silently and glanced around the pub again noticing the furtive smiles on the others. They ate with small conversation no one

really sure what to say. Harry was silently sorting through his feelings. He felt a slight pressure on his thigh and looked down to see a hand resting there. He liked the feeling but was shocked at the new boldness Ginny was exhibiting. Looking over to her she continued to eat as if nothing was out of the ordinary. He looked back at the small slender and elegant fingers that massaged his thigh sending comfort throughout his body. He relaxed a little more and was amazed she had this effect over him. Still concentrating on Ginny's hand he was startled back to reality when someone seemed to be shouting at him.

"Harry!"

"What" he snapped back without thinking and turned to face who was addressing him. Arthur Weasley was standing behind him with a knowing smile on his face. Harry was a little irked at that but shrugged it off; he had to get over the anger. Ginny quickly removed her hand and Harry recovered himself.

"Sorry Mr. Weasley, I was just thinking."

"I'm sure you were son. I just wanted to give you this." He said as he handed over an official ministry scroll.

'Son?' When did he start calling him that? Well he had used it before hadn't he? Harry shook himself; he didn't want to think about that. Looking over to Remus for help he couldn't move.

"Harry, take it." Remus said.

"What is it?" he asked not sure what he was being presented with.

"It's your apparition license. I thought that with all the chaos going on at the Ministry you would not want to deal with going there. So with a little help I was able to obtain this for you. I already believe you are quite proficient. I'm not sure how you did it but twice you have proved yourself quite the escape artist."

Harry was caught between accepting it and tearing it up. A hand was placed on his shoulder and he looked up into the warm supporting



eyes of Remus. Harry slowly took the scroll offered. "Thank you Mr. Weasley," he said quietly.

Not sure if he could take much more he turned to Remus who took the hint. Harry said his goodbyes before leaving and returned home alone. Remus wanted to stay a little longer to discuss his teaching post with Dumbledore and would be home later. They all knew that Remus was the only one that knew where Harry was and who he would talk to but they couldn't get him to reveal anything no matter how hard they tried.

At home Harry meditated on his bed over the day's affairs. He had been able to spend a few hours in the company of his former friends and it hadn't gone too badly. They hadn't pushed him for information; they had only tried to engage in small talk. Part of him really wanted to give them the information he knew they were dying to hear but he held back. No, now was the time to watch and wait. He had exams to study for, but he wasn't worried about that, he knew he would pass with flying colors with very little effort. They all still believed him to be the frail little boy they had imprisoned unjustly a year ago. He was no longer that and could see the approving glances Ginny sent his way throughout the day. He had also caught Hermione and Tonks checking him out their eyes the only sign that they liked what they saw. So they liked his new physique did they? He would have fun taunting them over the next year. Stop it that's childish! It was something Sirius and James would do. So why not?

Changing his thought he reflected on his former friend Ron and his reactions. He could tell Ron was not truly over his jealousy. Ron had caught a few of the gazes Hermione had sent Harry's way and he was less than happy about it. So Ron and Hermione got together, he thought. Well he saw that one coming a long time ago. He could have fun with this, but at what cost. No it would not due to taunt Ron so much. If only the git would grow up! Ron would have a very challenging year ahead of him if he continued this way. Part of him hoped Ron would do just that but the other part mourned the loss of his best friend.

After several hours, Harry was finally able to sort his mind and drifted into a dreamless sleep.

The next week flew by with Remus helping Harry review topics that would possibly show up for sixth year exams. Harry also spent time working out and practicing on his Phoenix form. Everyday he would go down to the riverside and practice his katras. It was a peaceful time and no one intruded on his sanctuary. He continued the disguise of James just so no one could place where he was living or see how much he had learned.

Sunday morning found him in the same peaceful spot by the river. The only clothing he wore was black cotton pants that hung loosely around his waist. Crisp clean air ruffled his hair cooling the sweat gleaming off his bare chest and arms as he repeated his exercises, meticulously flowing through the different positions. Today he felt a visitor and stretched out his senses to learn who it was. Ginny sat at her familiar spot under the old oak watching him. He could feel her intense gaze and he felt pride surface. He knew Ginny liked his body, so he decided to show off a bit. Flexing his muscles more than usual and quickening his pace he adlibbed and added a few other moves that he had practiced in the other realm. Leaping up into the air he flipped over backwards landing in a crouched position. Sweeping his arms out in front of him he rolled sideways and came up onto one leg kicking the other straight out. Once again crouching low he swept another leg out in a sweeping motion as if he was taking the legs out from under an opponent then sprang back into a back handspring. Tired and feeling a little stupid he decided to end the show and walked over to his bag to grab a towel. Pretending not to notice Ginny walking up to him he wiped off his sweaty body with the towel.

“Harry?”

“Oh hi Ginny” he responded without thinking. “What are you doing here?”

“Well I actually came to see if you knew where Remus was.” She replied with innocence. “You know it’s the weirdest thing.”

“What?”

“Well imagine my surprise coming down to my regular spot seeing a man moving through all sorts of motions. I expected it to be James; he’s always out here doing that. But the man in question responds to another name. Now I think to myself, this is very unusual. Hmmmm, wonder what could be going on.”

Harry kicked himself mentally for his slip up. “I don’t know what you’re talking about Ginny. I am James.”

“I don’t believe you James. Why don’t you tell the truth?”

“What truth would that be Ginny?”

“I think you know exactly what I’m talking about don’t you Harry.”

“No I don’t Ginny.”

“Thank you for confirming it HARRY!”

Harry could’ve of kicked himself again when she accentuated his name. Here she was talking to him the whole time switching up the two names and he had been responding to it naturally. Why did she have to have this effect on him? He couldn’t think properly around her. Maybe it was just the stress of trying to keep too many secrets.

“I gotta go Gin, I’ll see you around.” He said picking up his stuff and disappearing.

“See ya around Harry.” She said quietly, depressed that he had taken off so suddenly. Well at least that clears up a whole bunch of things, she thought. Confirming to herself that Harry had to live around here somewhere, she vowed she would find him and make him come out of his self imposed shell.

Returning home Harry was not in a good mood. How could he have let that slip? Now Ginny knew he was James, okay, well how bad could that be? She didn’t really know much more than the fact that he had been around Hogsmeade the whole time. She wouldn’t be able to find the house, he could probably see more of her if he wanted, that is if she continued to work at her brother’s shop. Would she

inform the order or Dumbledore? No, Ginny wouldn't do that. Would she tell her family or Hermione? Maybe, but she seemed to want to be around him the other day, she had given him comfort when no one else could. Surely she would keep this to herself. Pacing back and forth he desperately wanted to drink but knew it would be a bad idea with his exams starting tomorrow; no he had other things to get done today.

Gathering his self control he forced images of Ginny out of his mind and began to prepare for his tests tomorrow. A letter he had received a few days ago informed him of his schedule. Potions would be his first test tomorrow morning, starting with a written exam then a practical just like his O.W.L.s. He was looking forward to what Snape would throw at him and was certain it wasn't anything a normal seventh year would know. In fact he had a fairly good idea that Snape would try to trip him up with questions far beyond any N.E.W.T. level. Not worried in the slightest about the exam he would give Snape an added bonus. The potion was already ready and waiting for him to give the greasy smart ass. Then all would see whether or not Snivellus was equal to his title. Harry couldn't wait to see the potions master fail in trying to determine what potion Harry would be giving him and if everything worked as planned he would receive a small surprise. Well maybe not small but a surprise none the less.

Feeling better about the day Harry downed another potion he had been working on and was finally ready, he waited for the effects with anxiety. Pain split through his head and a bright white light encompassed his vision. Falling to the floor holding his head he bit his tongue to stop himself from crying out. The pain soon dulled to a throbbing ache and he was able to stand, but was still dizzy, grabbing a nearby table to steady himself he breathed heavily rubbing his eyes. They were sore and knew he should have waited until after the exams to take it, but he was impatient and acted before thinking it through. Making a mental note to think before acting he slowly made it up to his room and passed out on his bed.

The next morning came too early for Harry's liking, he woke up with a splitting headache and kicked himself again for taking the potion without planning ahead. Cursing the bright light that invaded his room through his windows he held his aching head and made his way to

the bathroom. Rummaging through the cabinet over the sink he found a mild headache reducing potion and took a gulp hoping it would act quickly. After a long hot shower he dressed in black slacks and a black t-shirt, slipping on the black dragon hide boots he had found in his vault, and his black robe with silver embroidery he made his way down to the kitchen for a quick bite to eat.

“Ah, you’re awake. I was just going to get you up. How are you feeling?”

“A little better now, remind me to think before acting from now on. I took that eye potion last night and woke up with a splitting headache.”

“I rather guessed you did something like that, as you’re not wearing your glasses. I assume it worked alright?”

“Yeah, it’s amazing really, I can see perfectly, but the potion I took to relieve the headache isn’t working so good.”

“Well, take another dose before you go, I don’t see how it could do any harm.”

“I think I will. You coming up to the school today?”

“Oh I think I might drop by, Professor Dumbledore asked me to come see him. I’m not exactly sure why but I have a few ideas.”

“Well it can’t be bad whatever it is, just stay on your guard around him.”

“Your right. So are you ready for your potions exam?”

“I think Snape’s going to be greatly annoyed today. Charms is this afternoon and I’m sure Professor Flitwick will be surprised. Actually I think all the professors will be surprised.”

“Harry you need to stick to the exams, no funny business alright?”

“Oh come on Moony, a marauder telling me not to pull any pranks? Get serious.”

"I am Harry, you need to pass these exams to get into you seventh year."

"Don't tell me after everything I've told you and everything you've seen me do you're actually worried I won't pass?"

"No Harry, I just don't want you to give them a reason to turn you away."

"Oh they won't have a reason, but I will give them something to think about."

"Okay, Okay, I won't argue anymore. Go take your potion and let's get going, I'll walk with you."

Being so close it didn't take them long to reach the castle. Upon entering the Great Hall all the professors were waiting to greet Harry. They immediately took in the confident air in which the young man strode into the hall, he was no longer the skinny under nourished boy they had known, but a tall well defined lanky man whose eyes sparkled mysteriously. The unruly black mop of hair was gone; his hair was now cut close to his head on the sides and the top also short but stood almost straight up like a muggle soldier. His scare was prominent on his forehead due to the lack of hair to cover it and the boy no longer wore glasses. He had definitely changed.

"Welcome Harry, Remus" Dumbledore greeted as they approached the head table where they were all gathered.

"Hello sir," Harry returned.

"Headmaster," Remus greeted with a nod of his head.

"Are you ready to begin Harry?"

"Whenever you are," Harry replied with a smirk at Snape, who glared back.

"We have decided that since it is the holidays and there are no students around that you will take your exams in the Great Hall. It will be easier that way. Once you have finished the written portion you will start on the practical while a panel of teachers will grade your written exam. You have two hours in which to complete each portion of the exam. Do you have any questions?" Dumbledore asked glancing at Harry over the rim of his spectacles.

"No, where do you want me to sit?"

"Right over there Harry, you may begin when you are seated."

Harry went to sit where they pointed to and as he sat down at the table an exam appeared on the desk with a bottle of ink and a quill. Harry stifled a chuckle at their attempt at preventing any cheating. Did they really expect him to cheat? Well I guess they would if they think I couldn't possibly have gained any knowledge over the last year. They still expect me to be some dimwitted boy. Shrugging off the hilarity of the situation, Harry started in on the questions. Within an hour he had finished all the questions and true to his speculation, Snape had not made it easy. Questions appeared on the test that even most potions teachers wouldn't know but Harry was undaunted and answered the questions expertly. Snape would have a fit. Rolling up his answers he headed up to the head table to turn it in. All heads snapped up from their conversations when Harry approached. Remus was the only one wearing a small smile which he was trying to hide behind his hand.

"You have a question Harry?"

"No, sir. I have finished and would like to start the practical portion early."

Harry bit back the chuckle at seeing the surprised expressions on everyone's faces. It was a sight he would remember with pleasure for the rest of his life, how ever short that may be.

"Are you sure Harry? You have another hour to go if you would like to review your answers."

“No, I’m certain I’ve done well enough.” Harry said placing his scroll on the table in front of the headmaster.

“If you’re sure then Harry,” Albus said eyeing the young man speculatively. When he noticed the small smirk Harry wore he was taken aback but recovered quickly. “Severus if you would please let him know what he is to accomplish for the practical exam.”

Severus stood haughtily and walked over to where Harry took the written exam. With a wave of his wand the chair disappeared and potions equipment and vials were spread across the table. “Within the next two hours you will produce the Veritaserum potion and the Skelo Growth potion. You may begin.” With that said, the slimy potions master returned to his seat and demanded to be the first to inspect Harry’s written exam. Harry began on his potions, this would take the full two hours as neither potion was easy to make and required special timing in adding ingredients, heating to precise temperatures and stirring in specific directions for a certain time. Although concentrating on the task before him, he could still feel the frustration coming from the potions master and the glares that were shot his way every once in a while. Harry couldn’t help but feel satisfied as he knew Snape couldn’t find anything wrong with his answers. Soon he could hear a whispered argument taking place between Snape and the other teachers and smiling to himself knew the slimy git was trying to dock points from the exam but couldn’t when everyone had read and scored it.

He was just topping off the vials of potion he had finished making when a bell chimed indicating his time was up. His senses alerted him to the fact that Snape was storming his way, intent on trying to find something wrong with the potions. Without acknowledging Snape he cleared his cauldrons and the mess on the table, grabbed his vials and walked up to the headmaster, knowing Snape would take this as a slight. As he reached the table he carefully placed the vials on the table and heard Snape approach them.

“I will just take those to my potions lab and analyze them there, headmaster. I will return within in the hour with the results.”



“Severus, you know that cannot be. We all decided that the potions would be analyzed here in the Great Hall where everyone can see. Now Harry you will be released for lunch and then we will start your exams for Charms.”

“Headmaster I must protest...”

“Severus that will be enough. It was decided long before and we will abide by that decision.” Albus raised his wand and a portable potions lab appeared at the one of the sides of the great hall.

Before everyone left Harry stopped them all. “Oh I have a bonus for the test headmaster. Not that I expect any extra points, but I thought Snape might enjoy trying to figure out this potion.” Harry said reaching into a pocket of his robes and pulling out a glass vial with a dark purple and silvery liquid inside. Placing it on the table he turned to leave noticing that all the professors were eyeing the vial curiously.

The Charms exam went without a hitch and all of them were impressed with his skill level. Harry smirked to himself knowing that they couldn’t possibly imagine what he actually could do but in time they would come to understand. That night Harry had a hard time getting to sleep due to the fact that he was having trouble suppressing the excitement he felt building for his little surprise come Wednesday. Eventually he was able to fall into a restless sleep dreaming of all the possible outcomes and shocked expressions that would be on the faces of his professors when his surprise came to fruition.

Tuesday came and went with exams in Care of Magical Creatures and Transfiguration. Once again he thoroughly surprised the professors with his knowledge and ability. He could see the anxious looks on their faces as they started to get an inkling that Harry was a very powerful wizard indeed, and the concerned but almost fearful looks as to how he came into that power. Shrugging it off he was emboldened with the pride that shown on Remus Lupin’s face. Once again that night he didn’t get much rest, tomorrow would be the day. He only had to get through Herbology in the morning without botching anything due to his nervous excitement.

Finally Wednesday afternoon arrived and Harry was purposefully taking his time answering the written portion of his Defense Against the Dark Arts exam. It seemed that his show of abilities had spread through word of mouth for almost the whole contingent of Hogwarts professors were in attendance as well as a few Auror members. Oh this was going to be fun. When the bell chimed signaling the end of the written exam, Harry lazily rolled up his parchment and brought it to the head table. He wore a mask of calm across his face but inside he was a writhing inferno of anticipation. Forcing himself to take deep steadying breaths he prepared himself for the practical exam.

“Harry,” Dumbledore addressed him and Harry looked into the twinkling blue eyes of the headmaster, “we have devised a somewhat unorthodox practical defense exam for you to better judge where you stand in this area. Several aurors have volunteered to assist us in this. You will be dueling with all of them to a degree, of course any spells or curses are allowed that you know of except that is for the unforgivables. Is that understood?”

“Yes sir, who will I be facing first?”

“You will not be facing them one at a time Harry; they will be, for lack of a better word, ‘attacking’ you unannounced. We want to determine your true ability in this area and this is the best way for us to see this. Are you ready?”

Harry made an audible gulp for show trying to make it look like he was scared and nervous about taking on all these aurors. He knew what the old man was up to. ‘Well it isn’t like you expected him to keep his word now is it?’ He would give the old man something to think about without revealing his true powers. His excitement only built though at seeing some action after over a month’s hiatus. Nodding his head, once again trying to make it look like he was unsure of himself, he walked to the center of the great hall and took up a defensive stance.

“On three ready? One.....Two.....Three!”

A shot of red light zoomed towards him and Harry easily jumped out of its way. Several aurors he didn’t know, Kingsley, Mad-eye and

Tonks encircled him. They didn't move, just stood still in their respective positions in the circle. Harry could immediately tell they were unsure about cursing him, and inwardly chastised them for underestimating a potential enemy. Another blaze of yellow light was cast at him and he erected a shield which caused the light to rebound at his attacker. The Auror jumped sideways dodging the curse which slammed into the wall behind him. Harry didn't bother to rotate in the center to see where the next curse would come from, he could feel the magic as soon as it was released, he was too busy thinking about how not to reveal too much of his abilities. Once again someone shot a stunner at him and again he deflected it with a shield charm but this time he added his own magic to the stunner and when it rebounded it caused it to fly faster and hit the originator square in the chest taking him out. He heard several audible gasps but blocked them out as more spells were released at him. Jumping up into the air he was able to avoid the spells which passed through where he had been standing and the spells continued on their path to take out two more opponents. This left 5 remaining and Harry quickly swung into action. Before landing back on the ground he shot a stunner at one of the unknown Aurors taking him out then quickly raised a shield charm protecting himself from a Reducto curse shot at short range. His shield wobbled but held and Harry bound the man successfully removing him from the fight. This now left Mad-eye, Tonks and Kingsley. It would become fun now. Instead of sending out any spells he dodged and jumped out of the way of the curses which only proved to prolong the mock battle and enrage his opponents, he could hear the professors talking as if making a running commentary of their actions and once voice stood out. Of course he knew this would happen, Snape of all people was so easy to predict.

"Headmaster, this is becoming tedious to watch. Obviously the boy possesses very little ability in dueling; he isn't even using his magic, just running around like an ape."

"Severus, be quiet and watch, I do believe our young Harry has a plan."

"How..."

“Professor Snape, how is that potion coming?” Harry asked nonchalantly while dodging several more curses.

“Mind your business Potter!”

“Oh don’t worry about that, I’m doing quite well. I was just wondering if you had been able to deduce what potion was in that vial I gave you two days ago.” Harry said placing emphasis on the two days ago. He knew that Snape hadn’t been able to figure out what it was and was furious about it.

“I haven’t had time to examine the contents as of late. I do have other priorities Potter!”

“Oh really? I would have thought it would spark your curiosity. Why don’t you have another look?” Harry said and with a wave of his hand the vial appeared floating in front of Professor Snape. Harry meanwhile continued to block and dodge the curses the three were sending his way in renewed vigor. They seemed to think he was distracted with his conversation with the potions master and took advantage of it much to their dismay.

“Potter, put that back! I do not have time to waste on this foolishness.” Snape growled looking anywhere but at the vial hovering in front of him. The other professors were dumbstruck and their eyes were glued to the vial. Professor Dumbledore wrenched his eyes away from the vial to study Harry intensely. He could feel the power radiating from the boy and wondered at where he had gained it, for a brief moment he was fearful, but after further scrutiny he could tell the boy’s aura was pure if only containing speckles of dark within it. He breathed a sigh of relief realizing this only represented the darkness of the boy’s painful life.

“How about taking a whiff? That might clue you in a little.” Harry taunted. He could feel the rage emanating off his potions master and let out a laugh. His three opponents took this opportunity again and shot their stunners as one to take him down. Harry only laughed more and erected a golden shield that looked like a globe that encompassed him, the stunners were absorbed into the shield and Harry grabbed his stomach from the pain of laughing at the look of

disbelief on everyone's faces. Snape still hadn't said anything so Harry decided to take the decision into his own hands, controlling his laughter he waved a hand at Snape and the cork popped off of the vial. Everyone stared in horror as a dark gaseous swirl wafted out of the vial. After a few seconds a full fledged Dementor appeared and everyone was overcome with its effects. The pain and horror on everyone's face was more than apparent and Harry now very serious waited for their responses.

Kingsley, Mad-eye and Tonks being the furthest away and therefore affected less were the first to react. They sent their patronus's after the Dementor but the spell had no effect as they were blocked by an invisible force none could see.

"Harry, what is the meaning of this?" Dumbledore gasped through his painful memories, the fear he had had about the boy earlier resurfaced in his mind.

"Just a little show for dear Professor Snape, that maybe he isn't as all knowing as he pretends to be." Harry replied taking a few steps closer to the head table where the professors were clutching at their heads trying to make their memories go away. "You had no idea, did you Snape" Harry drawled dripping with sarcasm and hatred. "That simple test of yours, if I do say so, was not anything that a sixth year would have had to deal with. Thought you were going to try and mess with me? You are an idiot Snape and this is just a warning to you never to mess with me again. You got it?" Although Harry was not shouting the threat was clear and potent in the menacing low tone of his voice. He saw the pathetic ex-Death Eater gulp and his eyes widen as the Dementor floated closer to him. Satisfied with his spectacle, Harry snapped his fingers and the Dementor dissolved into a pool of black silvery liquid on the floor then vanished without a trace. Harry then turned to his remaining opponents and with a wave of his hand all three were bound and their wands appeared in Harry's hand.

Due to the fact that everyone was still recovering from the effects of the Dementor they did not witness this last show of power from Harry and were surprised when they looked up to see Harry standing unhindered in the middle of the room.

"How did I do?" Harry asked innocently as if nothing had happened, studying the nails on one of his hands as if they were the most interesting things.

Several silent moments passed while they processed the latest events. Snape recovered faster than most.

"Headmaster I demand that this boy not be allowed re-entrance to Hogwarts as a student. He showed blatant disregard for authority and attacked me, a teacher at this school. I..."

"Severus, I do not believe the boy meant any harm. The Dementor, if it really was one, did not attack anyone and no one has been harmed. Harry, I must insist however that such actions will not go unpunished. This is a very grave and disturbing thing you have done. Would you mind explaining yourself?"

"No headmaster I will not. It is however up to you what you wish to do. Whether or not you let me back in to school is of little importance as my exams have proven. I do believe it to be in everyone's best interest to have me at the school, but if not..." Harry shrugged and met the headmaster's hardened eyes dead on. No one could miss the silent battle of wills that occurred in the brief moments and were shocked further when Albus Dumbledore, the most powerful wizard of the age, respected above all, broke contact first.

"I hope Harry, that we will not have any further show of such disregard?" Albus asked hopefully.

"That depends on whether or not that lap dog is kept on a tight leash." Harry responded casually.

Snape made a move for his wand, but before he could reach it he was frozen stiff.

"Now, now professor. I had thought you learned a lesson." Harry jibed without looking at Snape.

"Harry please release him" Dumbledore requested.

Shrugging again Harry made a motion with his wand and Snape was released but fell to the floor unconscious.

“Harry, I do not believe that was necessary.” Dumbledore sighed looking at the limp form of his potions master on the floor.

“I will not be unjustly attacked headmaster. You and I both know that as soon as I released him he would continue for his wand. I didn't want to be held accountable for the idiot's foolish actions or what the outcome would have been. This way is better; he'll have some time to cool off.” Harry once again growled out.

The other teachers watched expectantly and a little fearful at the interaction between the headmaster and the 17 year old boy. They couldn't fathom what was going on but knew they didn't want to interfere.

“Well Harry, it seems that you have aced all the tests that have been given to you. It is an unprecedented achievement. In all of Hogwarts history, never has anyone achieved such perfect scores, I might even add beyond perfect due to some added information you shared that had to be clarified. You will be readmitted and allowed to attend seventh year classes along with the rest of your classmates. If there is nothing else, Harry, then we will see you on September first with all the other returning students.”

Not about to be dismissed so casually, Harry spoke up. “Sir, I would like to request a private room upon my return to Hogwarts. I don't think it would be prudent to place me back in the dorms as yet. I am sure there are too many feelings running high at this moment and would not want to be the cause of any further disruptions.”

Eyeing Harry intently, Dumbledore had to agree with Harry. Although his innocence had been declared, most students would probably not be ready to interact with Harry quite yet. “I see your point, but may I suggest that other living accommodations may be made later during the year when things have calmed down?”

“We shall see.” Harry said tonelessly.

Dumbledore could see the pain in the boys eyes, this boy had been through so much and mainly because of himself. He wanted the boy to have a normal happy life but saw that it would not be. It pained his heart to see the torment in this boy before him but new Harry was acting out of the good of all.

“Well then Harry, we will allow you to reside in the Gryffindor Head Boys room as it will be unused this year. Do you have any objections to this Minerva?”

Shocked out of her musings Minerva literally jumped when she was addressed. Harry Potter had changed drastically. He was no longer the shy, nervous boy she had known. He wasn't even the boy she had seen at Grimmauld only a few weeks ago. He was a confident and self-assured young man that spoke with witty elegance and calculated wisdom. Not knowing what to say she just nodded her head in agreement.

Harry nodded to all the professors and turned to leave. “Thank you all for your time” he stated so all could hear him, and as he walked out of the huge double doors of the great hall he revived and released all his opponents with a single undetected wave of his hand.

Lost in thought he walked back to Hogsmeade and was only brought back to reality when he heard his name being shouted. Turning around he saw Remus running towards him out of breath so he stopped and waited.

“Harry! Bloody hell Harry, what was that all about with the Dementor! You could have warned me.” Remus scolded when he caught up to Harry.

Harry chuckled. “That would have ruined the surprise.” Harry smiled at the look of disdain he got in return.

“Was that a real Dementor? How did you do that?”

“Oh it was real alright. You felt the effects didn't you?”



“Yeah, but how did you destroy it. No one’s ever been able to do that. It’s unheard of. Dumbledore still believes it was a trick of some kind and that you were able to induce everyone to believe they were seeing a real Dementor and feeling the effects.”

“It’s a little potion I found in one of the ancient texts from my vault. It was a real Dementor. If Dumbledore and the others want to believe it something else, let them.” Harry stated with a shrug and turned to walk away signaling this was the end of the conversation.

“Okay, okay. But you have to show me how you killed that Dementor.”

Harry eyed Remus and smirked. “It’s a very powerful spell and takes a lot of magic to do. I’ll show you but I doubt you’ll be able to cast it.”

Remus looked shocked and Harry laughed. Let’s get something to eat shall we?”

“Sure. Oh and Harry before I forget, Arthur told me they’re all going to Diagon Alley tomorrow for school supplies and asked if you wanted to come with. How about it?”

“I think that might be okay. I do have to get school books and such, not that I need them. But for appearances and all.”

“Well we can meet them at the Leaky Cauldron at 10:00. You sure you’re okay with this, I know it’s still hard on you.”

“Yeah, but I guess the more I force myself to be around them the better off I’ll be. Don’t get any ideas though, I still haven’t forgiven them completely, they haven’t earned that yet.”

“I know Harry. But I’m glad you’re giving them a chance.”

“Oh and by the way there are a couple of other things I want to do while we’re there and you have to promise me not to freak out or anything.”

“Oh Merlin, what am I in for now?”

“You’ll see, you’ll see.” Harry answered smiling and picking up his pace realizing how famished he was.

## Chapter 9 Runes and Toys

The next morning Remus and Harry rose early. Harry wanted to get in a run and his workout before going to the alley and also needed some extra time to go through some items in his vault with Remus. Since his vault portkey wouldn't work with Remus he decided to go the old fashioned way. Remus touched Harry's shoulder and Harry apparated them both to the alley right beside Gringotts. They arrived at the bank about 08:30 figuring that would give them plenty of time before having to meet up with the Weasley's and presumably Hermione Granger. Harry once again had mixed feelings about this endeavor and was glad to preoccupy his mind with the task ahead. Meeting up with Griphook in the lobby they boarded one of the carts and sped off. As the cart stopped in front of his vault Harry peered at the doors and was surprised to see odd runes adorning the wall around the vault door. They were glowing faint silver and Harry was intrigued. Feeling drawn to the runes he walked toward the door in a daze and carefully traced some of the runes he could reach with his fingers.

"Those are goblin runes, Mr. Harry Potter sir." Griphook offered seeing the intrigue in the boys eyes.

Startled from his scrutiny he looked at Griphook. "I have seen them before but can't place them."

Remus stared at Harry wondering where he could possibly have seen runes such as these. He too was interested in the runes and would like to know more.

"Do you know what it says?" Harry asked Griphook quietly.

"It is ancient goblin writing Harry Potter sir and very difficult to translate as only the elders are allowed to continue the knowledge of these ancient runes."

"They're amazing, they remind me of the runes of the High Elves." Remus said in awe while inspecting runes on the opposite side of the door.

Griphook studied the two wizards. He was suspicious of their interest in the runes. Wizards never showed interest in goblin culture let alone the rare goblin runes that were carefully hidden. However, Harry Potter had proven his worth before and he decided to trust him once again. If Mr. Lupin was a friend of Harry's he would take a chance in placing a small trust in him as well.

"They are a derivation of the runes of the High Elves Mr. Lupin sir. Thousands of years ago the elves and goblins shared their written word before the rift. They grew apart in time but in essence they are the same."

"Please Griphook, can you tell me what they say, I know I have seen them before." Harry said with more conviction, but even after searching his mind he could not find where he had seen them before.

"I highly doubt you have seen these runes before Mr. Potter, they are only found in places where goblins dwell. They are highly protected by ancient magic so that only those of the goblin race may see them."

"I know I have but... Anyway can you please try?"

Griphook considered this for a moment scrutinizing the pleading eyes of the young dark haired wizard. It was true he was a Potter and therefore continued the line most respected by the goblin high council but you couldn't trust just anyone with the knowledge. They had to prove themselves. Maybe he would give him a little of what the runes said, it couldn't hurt telling him the first part, it wouldn't mean all that much to most wizards or witches. Yes maybe that could be a test of his worth.

"I will tell you what I can," Griphook said cautiously still searching the wizards before him for any negative sign. He held their rapt attention. "Protected herein lies the most ancient and honorable house of Potter, protectors of the truth.." Griphook waited for their response.

Harry rolled the words over in his mind. It seemed like something was missing, but not being able to read the runes he just stared at Griphook. To his honor the goblin looked calm and uncaring about the words he had just revealed but there was something else. Only

for an instant, but something shone in the dark orbs of the goblins eyes and Harry wondered at its meaning. No there was something else and if he wasn't mistaken this was some sort of test for him. Another riddle to be solved, Merlin how he hated riddles, but vowed he would uncover the hidden meaning. Tucking the information into a secure place in his mind he looked slowly over at Remus and noticed the man trying to work out the same thing he had. Turning back to Griphook he bowed his head slowly.

"Thankyou Griphook for revealing that, it is most interesting."

"You are welcome Harry Potter sir."

"Please just call me Harry, I understand your custom for formality and respect that but at least when we're together could we put that formality aside? I consider you a trusted friend after all you have done for me."

Griphook could see the sincerity of the boys words and bowed back in acknowledgement. "Would you like to enter the vault Harry?"

"Yes please Griphook, there are some things that I was not able to inspect last time and would like Remus to take a look at them with me if that's possible."

"As long as you willingly allow his entrance he may enter with you. I would advise Mr. Lupin to place a hand on your shoulder or arm to help him pass through the magic barrier."

Remus did as instructed while Griphook opened the vault with the key Harry gave him. Then Harry placed his hand on the platform that appeared and the massive door swung inward.

Remus was greatly impressed with the contents and was soon lost in perusing the variety of items it contained. Harry took his multi-chambered trunk out of his wallet and returned it to its normal size. With the help of Griphook and eventually Remus they placed all the remaining books and scrolls within the trunk. Harry then started going through other objects. Although there were numerous ancient magical

weapons he only took a sword whose hilt was encrusted with a single large ruby and intertwining coils of myhril and gold. It fit his palm perfectly and the weight felt right, in his arm. He swung it around in a few quick slashing movements and was satisfied. Upon further inspection he noticed that the wrist guard was an intricately designed set of dragons whose wings and tails formed the guard while it was connected to the hilt by its claws. He was starting to see the use of dragons a lot upon various articles in the vault. The scabbard was of black dragon hide and had several protection charms cast on it including one that would keep the sword razor sharp and in pristine condition. He also detected a charm that kept the sword invisible when sheathed and worn by the individual. A weapon like this could definitely come in handy. He strapped the scabbard onto him and started to walk towards Remus to show him his find.

A glint from one of the glass showcases in the room caught his eye. Sheathing the sword he walked over to the showcase and found the item. It was a silver colored ring. Once again it contained the dragon motif as the body of the dragon formed a circle that would fit around a finger, its tail tucked into the dragon's mouth. A solitary small ruby glowed brilliantly from the dragon's eye.

Harry felt someone approach but didn't respond, he knew he was in no danger.

"Ahhh, I see you have found the Ring of Draconus. It is an ancient ring that has been passed down through generations to the heir presumptuous of the Potter line. It contains no magic as we have been able to detect and has only acted as a symbol of the righteous heir to the line. Would you like to take it with you?"

"Yes please Griphook."

Griphook opened the case with a flick of his finger and Harry reached in to pick up the ring. He wondered idly if he wasn't looking to smug with four rings now adorning his hands. As he placed the ring on his finger he felt a small tingling sensation but wasn't disturbed by it. It was a warm tingling as if he was being protected, he felt safe and...what was that it be love? Sure enough he felt like he was being embraced in a loving and comforting hug, very much like those he

had received from his mother and from family in the other realm. It didn't bother him to think about it, he only wished he would be able to enjoy more of those hugs. This train of thought led him to Molly Weasley and how she had been like a surrogate mother. Just yesterday she had welcomed him in one of her famous bone crushing hugs. Although he hadn't felt the same feelings as before Azkaban he still wondered about them. He was slightly surprised by the thought. Was he so willing to forgive them for the past? All those things that had been said and done to him. The thoughts soon passed with the warmth of the ring and when he was again in control of his feelings the ring calmed down and felt normal.

"Harry come over here! I think you'll like this!" Remus shouted from across the vault.

"What is it?" Harry shouted back making his way to Remus' side.

Remus held out a black robe with silver lining and an embroidered silver dragon on the back with sparkling red eyes.

"WOW! That's cool, what is it?"

"I believe Harry that is your...." Griphook counting on his fingers interrupted, "5th great grandfathers battle robes. They have magical shielding properties. There is also a set of pants and vest that goes with it. They also have shielding properties and are charmed to fit the wearer. I believe they are also weather resistant and have temperature charms on them to adjust to the wearers needs and are self repairing."

Remus sorted through the rack of robes before him and soon enough found the mentioned items. Without wasting a second Harry took the items and disappearing behind one of the racks, for modesty, he changed into them. His black dragon hide boots seemed to match the armor and could only guess that he was meant to find them. Well they were in his vault, so that was an easy guess, he told himself.

"How does it look?" Harry said stepping out from behind the rack.

Remus whistled appreciatively and Griphook nodded in agreement. "They suit you Harry" he said.

"I like them. They fit perfectly! Is there anything else that I should know about these, a manual of some sorts?" Harry stated.

Griphook studied the robes for a brief moment then with a wry smile nodded his head. "It seems there is also a spell that prohibits anyone from taking the armor off you unless you permit it. See that small silver dragon on the breast plate? You must place your hand over it and choose a password that will allow you to take off the armor. It will also let anyone else you choose to give the password to remove it as well."

"Bloody brilliant!" Harry exclaimed as he set his new password. He wasn't about to give out his password to anyone though.

"Well is there anything else sirs?" Griphook asked almost as if prodding them for something else.

Harry caught the expectant feeling but shrugged it off just as quick. Looking down at his new clothes then over at Remus he started rummaging through the items on the racks. He came across the perfect set. Pulling them out he handed them to Remus.

Remus looked dumb. "They're nice Harry but I don't think blue is your color." He said not knowing what else to say.

Harry chuckled and thrust the robes into Remus chest. "They're for you, Moony. Try them on."

"I couldn't Harry, they're your family's...."

"Try them on. There are more here than I would know what to do with! I could open my own shop with all this. As it is I'll most likely never have to buy another item of clothing in my life. I want you to have them. They will keep you safer than those old rags. Please Moony, for me?" Harry said giving his best attempt at puppy dog eyes.



Laughing at the mock plea from Harry he relented and tried on the robes. He was amazed at how comfortable they were. They fit perfectly and he could tell they had very similar properties to the ones Harry was wearing. Harry returned Remus's whistle of earlier and Griphook actually cracked a smile, very unusual for goblins. Taking one last look around Harry shrunk his trunk and was about to leave when another trunk set off by itself in a corner caught his eye.

"What's that?" Harry asked pointing at the trunk.

"Oh just another trunk with various magical items within, would you like to take a look?" Griphook prompted.

This time Harry didn't need prompting as he strode purposefully over to the trunk, placed his hand on the lock and it sprang open. Griphook and Remus wore surprised expressions when Harry looked over his shoulder at them. When he looked back into the single compartment of the trunk he was surprised when there was only one item laying there. It was a small worn book. Harry could tell it was very old as the leather of the binding seemed to be falling apart. Placing a restorative and a protection charm upon it he picked it up and thumbed through the pages. It seemed to be a history of the goblin race, but not the history he was used to hearing in professors Binns class. Closing the book he sent a questioning look to Griphook who remained stoically silent. Knowing he wouldn't get any further answers he once again opened his trunk and placed the book inside. After shrinking the trunk and placing it in his wallet he motioned for Griphook to lead the way out of the vault.

"What was it Harry?" Remus questioned as they rode the cart back to the surface.

"It's a book of goblin history, though it doesn't seem to be the history that is taught at school." Harry answered puzzled.

"So you can read the book." Griphook spoke from the front over the noise of the cavern.

"What do you mean? Of course I can read it. It's in plain English."

“You will see in time Master Harry.” Was the only reply before silence once again resumed. Harry looked at Remus and raised an eyebrow to which Remus only shrugged.

“We’ll look at it later.”

Before anymore conversation could be started they reached the entrance to the bank and Griphook bowed deeply and set off on other business.

“Why all the formality?”

“Well we are back in the public Harry. But I’m guessing it may also have something to do with that book you found. Why don’t we head off to the Leaky Cauldron? I’m sure the Weasley’s will probably be there soon.” Harry grimaced at the thought of spending a whole day with them but knew it would make Remus happy. He felt a warm tingling from the Ring of Draconus and the thoughts disappeared and he became more confident. He would not allow them to ruin the day.

As they entered the Leaky Cauldron, sure enough all the Weasley’s were present, minus of course Percy. Oddly enough he didn’t feel any remorse or guilt and that strengthened him. Before he realized it, he was engulfed in a warm motherly hug, one that he had been wishing for not long before. Turning his head he saw the mop of red hair and realized it was Mrs. Weasley. It didn’t feel the same but he returned the hug anyway. Taking a step back he saw Hermione racing forward but shook his head at her and she stopped dead in her tracks. Looking as if she was about to break down and cry she dropped her chin and backed away quietly.

Ginny nervously but bravely stepped forward after this show and looked up at Harry. Taking another step forward she wrapped her arms around him and gave him a welcoming hug which he surprisingly didn’t refuse. Behind her she could hear the tell tale sniff from Hermione indicating that she had been hurt by this. Ginny felt only a momentary guilt at this before she felt Harry return the hug.

Harry was greatly affected by Ginny’s hug and couldn’t resist returning it. Her warm soft body crushed up against his and he

reveled in the emotions that she awakened within him. He was forced however, to calm himself when she reluctantly pulled away to make room for her brothers and fathers to shake hands with Harry.

Harry shook hands mechanically still thinking about how Ginny had affected him. Sure he had begun to have feelings for her before Azkaban but this was so much more. He couldn't put a finger on exactly what he felt. He felt an arm on his shoulder and looked to see Remus smiling at him knowingly and was perturbed at the mans ability to read him so well.

"Nice robes Remus and Harry!" Fred stated admiring the two.

"Yeah, are those battle robes? Where'd ya get em?" George added.

"Leave him alone you two. I think they look great!" Ginny said smiling and chancing a glance up at Harry.

Harry smiled in return then looked to the rest of the Weasley's. Ron wore his typical jealous scowl. He refused to answer their questions though. He wouldn't start explaining himself to others, he didn't have to, let them guess a little.

"Well where should we start?" Remus asked to everyone present and effectively changing the subject.

"Why don't we go to Flourish and Blotts?" Hermione suggested.

Ron rolled his eyes. Nothing ever changes, Harry thought for a second before. Not caring where they went first he followed the others blindly.

Flourish and Blotts was crowded with students and their parents trying to get the appropriate text books for the upcoming school year. He could feel the stares and heard the whispers as he passed but ignored them and quickly paid for the books he needed. He and Remus exited the shop and waited outside for the others. He only prayed that he wouldn't run into Draco Malfoy. If ferret face showed up he wasn't to sure he would be able to stop himself from cursing the arrogant bastard into oblivion.

After noticing that Harry and Remus had already left, the others soon exited the shop and they proceeded on to Madame Maulkins Robes for all occasions. Since Harry and Remus had already purchased enough robes they sat quietly in soft fluffy chairs while the others tried on several different robes. The shop wasn't as busy since most students hated having to stand around getting measured. They would make their selections and either have them delivered to their homes or pick them up at a later time. Since there was to be a Halloween and Yule Ball this year with the possibility of more, the girls were painstakingly trying on numerous robes commenting on the positive and negative attributes of each.

"This is bloody boring!" Ron whispered harshly leaning towards Harry. "You want to go to Quality Quidditch and check out the new brooms? I hear there's a new one just released that supposed to be better than anything ever made."

"No, I think I'll just sit here for a while and take a breather. You go on ahead." Harry said. He liked watching Ginny trying on the different robes and seeing her smile and laugh while doing it. He didn't want to spend the time with Ron whining about how he couldn't afford a new broom or whatever else his small brain could think up to complain about. No, this quiet observing was more to his liking. He heard Ron huff and not too soon after the bells from the entrance telling him Ron had left. Charlie, Bill and the Twins soon followed but Harry didn't move from his pleasant spot.

He went back to silently enjoying Ginny parade before him showing each new robe she tried on. Hermione was doing the same but he only barely acknowledged her attempts to get him to comment on what she was wearing, there was no interest there at all. It almost seemed that they both were going to go through the entire shops selection. He nodded and grimaced with each showing, playing along until Ginny stepped out and took his breath away. She was wearing a long flowing silk gown that hugged tightly in the chest and midriff then flowed out generously to her feet. The excess fabric cascaded gently trailing behind her when she walked. The shimmering golden brown color brought out the brilliance of her eyes and flattered her skin color. Harry had trouble suppressing a gulp when he noticed that there was

no back to the gown when she turned. Her smooth cream colored bare skin teased him and he wanted to reach out and caress her just to see if what he imagined her to feel like was real. The almost non-existent sleeves hung suggestively at the tip of her shoulders and were tight fitting to her arms, suggestively revealing her freckled skin as the fabric was gathered together by a slight button every couple of inches or so along their length. The bodice was low cut exposing the curve of her breasts in a demure way. He could not take his eyes off her and was struggling to maintain control of his raging hormones. He had never reacted this way to any other girl, even Cho Chang had never done this to him. He was grateful when the voice of Madam Maulkin interrupted his thoughts.

“Oh dear, I do believe that one is perfect for you” she said clapping her hands together in front of her mouth in obvious delight.

“How much?” asked Molly Weasley in a purely business tone even though her eyes showed how much she agreed with the lady.

Harry noticed this and winced at the thought that Ginny wouldn't be able to afford such a gown. Before the price could be stated however, Hermione came out looking radiant in a gossamer blue gown and all three women turned to rave complements about how she looked. Harry didn't miss the quick glance Ginny took and the price tag hanging off the robe she was wearing. Nor did he miss the silent look the girls exchanged before sadly returning to the changing rooms to take the gowns off.

As soon as the girls left Molly Weasley returned to the racks in obvious pain that she couldn't afford such a beautiful gown for her only daughter. Harry of course noticed this too and his mouth turned up into a devious smile as an idea came to mind. Without attracting attention he made his way over to Madame Maulkin and leaned closer to her.

“Madame Maulkin I would like you to do me a favor please.” Harry whispered conspiratorially.

“How may I help Mr. Potter?” she asked.

“That dress that Miss Weasley had on, I know she won’t buy it but you and I both know it was the best. Could you possibly wrap it up for her? I will pay the difference plus a little extra for your help.”

“I would be honored Mr. Potter. She looked like an angel in that dress. I could almost imagine it was made specifically for her.”

“Please don’t let anyone know about it though. If you let me there is a charm I could place on the dress to make it look like the one she purchases until the ball.” He stated suggestively.

Madame Maulkin shot him a glance that said she had never heard of such a thing but in the end agreed to let him do it. Finally the girls found dresses that they could afford and looked nice on them, but not as nice as the others. It was apparent that they were disappointed but Harry was busy enough suppressing his mirth at the thought of what Ginny would discover herself wearing when it came time for the ball. He was definitely looking forward to it. Madame Maulkin said they could pick up the dresses in two hours and they all left to catch up with the others.

“Oh, I’ll be right back I forgot my package. Go on ahead and I’ll meet up with you at Quality Quidditch.” Harry said as he ducked back into the store. Making sure no one was around he quickly performed the charm on Ginny’s robes. Madame Maulkin was impressed and gleefully shook Harry’s hand stating what a gentlemen he was. Harry thanked her and quickly ran out to catch up with the group in front of Quality Quidditch Supplies.

Looking into the store display window he found that he didn’t feel the same excited rush he had once felt for Quidditch. Sure he was excited about flying on his broom again, if he still had one. There was nothing like the exhilaration he felt when flying freely in the air, but Quidditch somehow didn’t hold the same desire.

“Hey Harry!” Ron said shouting to him from the inside of the shop. “You gotta see this! It’s the new Firebolt Extreme! Just released to the public!”

Harry made his way over to Ron. Looking at the broom all he could think about was his old Firebolt, the one Sirius had given him. He wondered what had happened to it while he was locked up. Anger rose up within him at the thought that they might have destroyed it like they did his photo album. Biting his lower lip he leaned forward pretending to study the sleek broom.

"Wonder how much something like that goes for?" Charlie asked also scrutinizing the broom.

"More than any of us can afford" Fred stated.

"I bet Harry could afford it. How 'bout it mate? You could get it for Quidditch this year." Ron said while slapping Harry on the back.

Harry stiffened at Ron's attempt at joking around. In the old days he wouldn't think anything of it. Now it was different, too different. Things weren't the same anymore and once again Harry wondered about his Firebolt, he also wondered about Ron's remark about him being able to afford it. Was his jealousy acting up again, was he trying to insinuate that he needed a new broom? If he was then that must mean that something happened to his old broom.

"No, I think I'll continue to use the Firebolt Sirius gave me." He said trying to catch any sign that would indicate what had happened to it.

All the Weasley's became very intent on locking their eyes with the Firebolt on display. This confirmed the fact in Harry's mind that something had indeed happened to his Firebolt. He felt the Ring of Draconus tingling once again and the warmth enveloping him allowing him to control the anger and hate building within him. Without another word and acting bored with the items around him, he made for the door of the shop not caring about leaving behind the people he was supposed to be with that day. He was halfway down Diagon Alley heading to the potions shop before he realized someone calling his name.

"Harry?...Harry!" Ginny shouted pulling on his arm finally catching up to him.

Harry swatted her arm away like an annoying bug, but she persisted and finally they stopped. Ginny noticed the calm features of his face but upon looking into his eyes could see the anger hidden there and its intensity scared her. Upon seeing this she knew something was wrong.

“Harry, what happened?”

Running a hand through his short hair, which curiously felt like a bristle brush, he dropped looked her straight in the eye. “Nothing, it’s just hard getting use to big crowds again.” Harry said. It wasn’t a complete lie but he didn’t want to talk about it.

“Harry, I saw the others eyeing that new Firebolt. I just figured it brought back some painful memories when you stormed out so quickly.”

Harry stared at her, she had hit the nail on the head and hadn’t even been involved in the conversation. How did she do that?

“It’s okay Harry, I’m not sure what happened to your broom, but I could ask around for you if you’d like?”

Not knowing what to say he closed his eyes and nodded. They didn’t have time for any further conversation as Remus and the rest of the group came trotting up to them.

“There you are Harry, we’ve been looking for you. Something the matter?” Remus asked concerned etched on his face. He knew something had happened in the Quidditch supply shop but was not paying attention when Harry had left. Seeing the silent pleas for him to drop the subject in Harry’s eyes told him enough. “How about we all go to Fleureans for some ice cream?” He suggested before anyone could ask another question. Of course everyone agreed and they headed back up the street. Harry deciding this was the perfect opportunity for his ‘other’ business laid a hand on Remus’s arm to hold him back.

“Follow me Moony and don’t say anything yet.”



Remus nodded and followed Harry in the opposite direction, back towards the Leaky Cauldron. When they were close and Harry started to turn into Knockturn Alley, Remus halted and grabbed Harry's robes.

"Harry what are you doing, you can't go down there!"

"Unfortunately Moony I am. A couple of shops down is all. You'll see, it won't be that bad, but you better keep an eye out."

"You're kidding right? Harry it's too dangerous, a lot of dark arts business is conducted down there."

"Yes, but there are other shops that don't deal in that at all. Some of the owners just can't afford better accommodations. They're no worse or better than those on Diagon Alley. Plus it's the only shop of its kind around. Come on it won't take long."

"Harry if anyone sees us down there, they'll think we're up to something."

"Well, then they would be correct in their assumptions. I am up to something."

"Harry you know what I mean. They'll think..."

"Moony, right now I could care less what everyone thinks. I've given up on worrying about it. It's not worth the effort. I'm a big boy now and can take care of myself, and because I can I'm going to do what I please. Now are you coming or not?"

"I better go with you to keep you out of trouble. Now will you please tell me what we're doing?"

"Sure just follow me" Harry said and walked quickly into Knockturn Alley. Just as Harry had mentioned he stopped in front of a dingy blackened doorway with a sign overhead that read "MAURY'S MAGNIFICENT MAGICAL MUSES". Remus placed another restraining hand on Harry's shoulder but he shrugged it off. "You can either wait for me here or come inside." And Harry pushed the door open.

Inside, the shop was magically expanded and was neat and very clean. Pictures danced on the walls as if someone had gone artistically crazy. Remus had no idea what this place was supposed to be and followed Harry dumbly over to a display case that had all sorts of small earrings and other weirdly shaped jewelry. A small but strong bald man came out of the back of the shop and approached them.

“What do ya want?” he asked gruffly. He had a lower voice than anyone could imagine considering his looks.

“I’m here for a couple of things.” Harry stated unflinching before the man. “First a magical tattoo, that wolf claw ear piece and something special. Have you ever heard of scale grafting?”

The man’s eyes nearly bulged out of their sockets when Harry mentioned that last part. It was an ancient and very rare type of body art that not too many people ventured into. Besides the fact that it was expensive, it was very painful. He had only done one himself since being taught the procedure. It was easy and quick but very permanent and you could never tell how someone would react. The old mystic that had taught him the procedure loved to tell him stories of the old tribes where the culture had come from and how some people wound up crazy or dead. This boy was either very stupid or had a lot of money to waste, or both.

“I see you have,” Harry continued after using a little legilimency. “Well I have brought my own scales which I would like you to use. They are from a Black Hungarian Horntail. I would like them carved into the shape of dragons, one for each arm please.”

“An what ‘bout ‘at tattoo ya mentioned, what its gonna be?” the bald man asked. Meanwhile Remus was trying to steady himself. He couldn’t stop Harry but he knew he would be in for it from everyone when they found out. He was trying to reason out why Harry wanted this done to his body when he caught Harry disappearing into the back of the shop. Feeling like a bit of fresh air was needed he left the shop. After taking in the darkening atmosphere he quickly changed

his mind and re-entered waiting impatiently. It wasn't that he was scared but it wasn't a good idea to attract attention to himself.

Meanwhile Ginny had noticed that Remus and Harry had fallen back from the group and made a quick decision to go after them. She wasn't about to let them mysteriously disappear on her again. She could see them arguing near the Leaky Cauldron now but then they headed off into a nearby alley. Without thinking she followed at a discreet distance, not wanting to be seen. Catching sight of the shop they entered she waited impatiently for them to finish whatever they were doing and exit. Minutes ticked by and still they remained within the shop. Taking a nervous look around the dim alley realization struck and fear began to rise. What could they possibly be doing in Knockturn Alley. A cat skidded out from behind a group of ragged boxes screeching as it went and made Ginny jump. That was all the attention the denizens of the alley needed to know that she didn't belong there. Several eyed her evilly and Ginny watched in horror as they stalked closer to her. Eyeing her up and down as if she were something precious they could bargain off she became frantic. An old hag with stringy black hair and warts all over her face looking like a magical experiment had gone wrong reached out a boney hand to poke Ginny in the shoulder and she flinched away from the unwanted touch. More creepy darkly ill clad individuals crawled out from their hiding places in the alley to slowly encircle her. Ginny couldn't think anymore, she screamed as loud as she could and kept screaming as they moved closer and closer.

Harry had just described his tattoo to the bald man when he heard a scream. It was a very familiar sound and he stood up abruptly.

"I'll be right back, don't go anywhere" He said whipping his robe around him and heading out of the shop. He saw Remus who was looking grim. "So you noticed too?" Harry asked grimacing.

"I think it's Ginny"

"Yeah it is, stay here Remus in case I need back up."

"But Harry.."

"No, please, just do as I say, I don't have time to argue. Plus I need you to keep an eye on Igor over there so he can finish this." He said jabbing a finger in the bald mans direction.

Stepping out of the shop Harry immediately discerned the source of the problem. A little up the street, about 8 unknown black robed miscreants were swarming around Ginny. They poked and prodded her like some freak show exhibit. Ginny had no where to go and the intense fear that showed on her face enraged Harry. Lifting his arms into the air he sent out 8 beams of bright white light that bound Ginny's tormentors and pulled them back away from her like they were puppets. Harry left them bound and strode purposefully forward until he stood right next to a shaking Ginny.

"Ginny?" he whispered trying to control the hardness in his voice.

"H-H-Harry?" she asked shakily looking up with an ashen face, before flinging her trembling arms around him.

"Oh Harry, I was so scared, there were just too many of them. I f-froze!"

"SShhh! Come with me Ginny, you'll be okay." Harry wrapped a protective arm around her shoulders and led her back to the tattoo parlor. Once inside she seemed to calm down a bit and upon seeing Remus she relaxed even more.

"What are you doing here?" She asked.

"I would ask you the same thing Ginny," Harry replied with a raise of his eyebrow.

"Well I saw you two sneaking off and decided to follow you. If I had known you were coming down here...well....I.."

"What would you have done Ginny?" Remus asked chuckling as the once timid scared young lady was now fuming with indignant anger.

Ignoring Remus she turned on Harry and if he hadn't realized the seriousness of the situation he would have laughed outright at her

show of anger. She reminded him very much of Mrs. Weasley throwing a rant at the twins.

Ginny didn't miss the glint of humor that shown in Harry's eyes and the twitch that he was fighting at the corner of his mouth. Only feeding her anger she thrust her fists onto her hips and narrowed her eyes even more.

"You better start explaining Harry."

Harry shrugged and turned around to walk into the back room where the bald man was waiting. Poking his head around the doorframe he taunted her. "Why don't you come and see?"

Stomping her foot, and huffing loudly she stormed into the back room ignoring the laughter filling the room from Remus.

"What's this...." Ginny stopped upon seeing a bare-chested Harry sitting on a bench in the middle of the room. His muscles were very well developed and she wanted to reach out and run her hands along their contours. Shaking herself and remembering she was mad at Harry she forced herself to look anywhere but at Harry's chest. A bald short man sat behind Harry on a stool intently studying Harry's back. Ginny looked at him quizzically.

"It's a tattoo Gin. He'll been done shortly if you want to see it."

"What in Merlin's name do you want a tattoo for?"

"Oh I have many reasons,"

"Harry answer the question." Ginny insisted.

"Well for one it's a reminder of Sirius."

"Oh, Well what is it?"

"Wait and see, I think you'll like it."

"I'm not sure about that Harry. I can't see any reason for marking your body like that."

"Than you're definitely not going to like the next bit. If you want you can wait outside with Remus, I'm sure he'll enjoy the company."

"Fine, I'll just do that then..." Ginny nearly shouted and turned on her heel to leave.

30 minutes later Harry was biting his lips trying not to scream out of the pain his arms were in. The scale grafting while done quickly still hurt significantly as they had to literally be fused to his skin. Maury, as he had learned the bald mans name, warned him to keep them bandaged for 3 days. He had to change the dressings twice a day and apply a special salve over the scales for a week to keep them moist and supple. Beyond that time Maury said that if he needed more salve or anything else was needed or any problems arose to owl him. The ear piercing was the least painful of the three and he barely noticed it due to the pain in his arms. Finally finished, Maury had Harry stand in a three way mirror that allowed him to see his tattoo and the dragons on his arm.

The tattoo normally was just a large pawprint, one that Padfoot would have left behind on the ground. Its magical qualities would show every once in a while by breaking up the large paw print and turning into four little ones that would walk across his back in different patterns. It looked like an invisible miniature dog was roaming there leaving muddy footprints behind. He was pleased as it definitely reminded him of Sirius and he felt a small connection to him.

The scale grafts were intricately carved dragons that encircled each of his upper arms. When they were still it would appear just like his ring, as if the dragons were biting their own tails. Maury assured him however that this might change as the magic inherent in the scales would show itself in some way. Harry could only imagine how that would be. The dragons looked like regular black specially designed arm bands; however these would never come off, hence the grafting part. If he grew bigger they would also grow. He was greatly impressed by them and was almost giddy with excitement to see what they would do.

His wolf claw was just the icing on the cake, as the muggle saying goes. It was black with silver streaks where there was fur. Four sharp claws curled around the middle of his earlobe and punctured the cartilage securing the claw to his ear. It wasn't large but it was very obvious considering he no longer had hair to hide it. Mrs. Weasley would throw a fit upon seeing it. Well he could always change his hair to cover it, but that wasn't the point. He wanted people to see it. If they were going to continually stare and whisper about him he might as well give them something to actually talk about. Maybe for just once they would look at something other than his unique curse scar. Feeling rebellious he left his shirt and cloak off while he sought out Remus and Ginny's opinion. Even though he didn't care what others thought, with those two it mattered.

Walking out into the main area he saw Remus and Ginny deep in conversation, so he snuck up on them.

"What cha talking about?" He laughed as both Remus and Ginny nearly toppled out of their chairs.

Ginny eyed him critically taking in first his earring then traveling down his chest. When her eyes saw the scales they bulged. "What are those?" she shouted pointing to one of his arms.

"That Gin, is a scale graft. I have found I am particularly fond of dragons and well...there they are. What do you think Moony?"

"Harry...I...never...thought it was something like that!" He said flabbergasted with the sight before him.

"Well let's see the tattoo then." Ginny said with pursed lips.

Harry turned around and was happy when he heard the gasps as he felt the tattoo come alive and walk across his back. Harry turned back around after several minutes and saw the blank look on Remus face. "What is it Moony?" Harry asked afraid he might have gone too far.

"Is that...Padfoot?"

"Yes" Harry replied somberly.

"Well I can't go against the tattoo as I have one too. All the marauders got one, but those scales Harry. I just don't know. What are they suppose to do?"

"Dunno." Harry said shrugging. "Maury says in time they might do all sorts of things. I'll just have to wait and see."

"Oh this is just.... I can't believe you Harry! What will everyone think?" Ginny shouted and began to pacing nervously around the room.

Harry's anger rose. "As I told Remus earlier Ginny, I don't give a damn what everyone else thinks. I did this for myself. It felt like the right thing to do and I did it."

"Harry but don't you think some day you'll regret it?"

"NO!"

"Okay, calm down Harry. I just don't know. I have to admit that I like the earring and the tattoo, but.."

"I think we should be getting back. I'm sure everyone will be frantic that we snuck off on them again." Harry said barely moving his mouth and quickly had Maury bandage his arms before cautiously putting his shirt and robes back on, wincing slightly as he had to move his arms.

"Remember kid what I told ya about them bandages and that salve. It'd be easier to have someone help ya with that, maybe that spirited gal yonder?"

"That's none your business. Thank you for your work, I'll owl if I need anything." Shaking Maury's hand he paid and left the shop with a sniggering Remus and irate Ginny. He ignored them both until they met up with the Weasley's and Hermione at Eyelops Owl Emporium.

"Oh Harry dear, we were wondering where you had gone." Mrs. Weasley scolded. Harry could tell she was very upset with him but



didn't know how far she could go now. "Ginny! You scared the life out of me! I will not have you running off on me like that! You are in big trouble young lady, and we'll be discussing this later. We only have a few more things to pick up and then everyone is going home."

"Mum..." Ginny whined but was interrupted.

"There will be none of that Genevra Weasley!" Mrs. Weasley shouted with her hands on her hips and that look. Again Harry fought to maintain a serious expression.

"FINE! Harry here can get away with earrings and tattoos and... and... but me. Ah... forbid I just follow to make sure he's alright! None of you even noticed he was gone! If I didn't know better I'd say you all went around the bend!"

Mrs. Weasley as if noticing Harry for the first time looked directly at his rather obvious earring and raised a hand to her mouth to cover her exclamation of shock. "Harry how could you?" she questioned.

Harry only shrugged and walked over to the counter to ask for some owl treats before remembering that he didn't even know where Hedwig was. He hadn't seen his snowy white friend since that night and wondered if she was alright. Shaking his head of the thoughts he turned to find Remus. Remus was not in the shop so he went out into the alley and found him sitting on a bench next to the shop.

"Hey Moony."

"How'd it go Harry?"

"You know." He replied blandly.

"I would've expected Molly to be screaming her disapproval by now." Remus said glancing once again at Harry's ear.

"Yeah, well I don't think they know how to act around me now. It's pretty awkward for everyone. I think we should just go. We'll see them at the station in a couple of days anyway."

“Well let’s just say goodbye. I don’t feel comfortable just leaving, we’ve done that enough today.”

“Okay.”

After saying a few short goodbyes, minus the usual hugs, Harry found that he missed that closeness. It was still uncomfortable for him to be around his former friends but each time got a little easier as long as they weren’t prodding and questioning him. He only hoped that there was enough between them all to move beyond this point. He would take it slow. He watched them closely and he saw that they were really trying but were they all trying to hard? No, it was bound to be hard at first and if they didn’t try there was nothing to hold them all together. He still wondered about Ron. Something besides the normal tension was there, but he couldn’t place it. He knew Ron’s jealousy was pretty powerful. Harry didn’t want that to get in the way of his plans.

That night Harry sat down in the living room with the history book he had taken from his vault and began reading. As it was not the same history about goblin rebellions that Professor Binns taught in History of magic, he found it very interesting. It wasn’t written by the goblins but from a third point of view. A very enlightening examination of the faults, fallacies and attributes of all sides in the conflicts was discussed in depth. Harry could see why the goblins continuously rebelled and how the wizarding world kept trying to keep them controlled but neither side was willing to go beyond these obvious petty matters. It was really quite simple after all, a never-ending circle of oppression and rebellion. If they could only take the time to talk it out both sides would see that they were all trying to achieve the same goal.

Harry was reading quickly now that he found it fascinating when Remus came in. “You know Harry; never thought I’d see the day when I’d see you actually interested in what you were reading. Hermione would be proud.”

“Shut it Moony.” Harry said warning him not to push it.

“What are you reading anyway?”

"It's that book we found in the vault, the one about goblin history." Harry said not taking his attention away from the book.

"Oh, do you think I could take a look at it?"

"Yeah sure, when I'm done."

"Well, since your obvious not in the mood for talking, I'm going to head up early. Long day."

"Sure Moony."

"Don't stay up too long Harry." Remus said ruffling the top of Harry's head.

Harry enjoyed Remus's attempt to ruffle his hair. There were benefits to not having enough hair to make any messier when he did that. He was also comforted by Remus's fatherly attention, even though the man didn't know he was doing it. It felt more natural and meant more to him than others who had tried to force it. Musing over these thoughts he continued to read into the night not realizing the time.

Remus woke the next morning and went to check on Harry but didn't find him in his bed. He was worried but realized Harry could be just about anywhere doing anything so he held it in check until he searched the rest of the house or the river where he liked to workout. He was only slightly surprised to see Harry curled up on the couch sleeping soundly with the book he had been reading lying open on his chest, and wondered how he could of missed him on his initial search. Picking up the book he noticed that Harry had nearly finished it. It must be very interesting for Harry to have almost gone through the entire thing Remus speculated. Setting the book down on a side table he summoned an afghan and spread it over the sleeping form. He would let Harry sleep as late as he wanted today since there were no special plans. He only hoped that they could have a nice simple day together before they both returned to Hogwarts for the year.

## Chapter 10

Harry in fact slept through most of the morning, while Remus worked out in the green house. Remus was content to let Harry sleep peacefully, however he was far from the truth of the matter. Harry tossed and turned struggling against the dreams that invaded his mind. Scenes repeated themselves only varying slightly. He dreamt of his parents death, of Cedric Diggory dropping lifeless to the ground in the graveyard of Little Hangleton, Sirius falling into the veil, his use of the cruciatus curse on Bellatrix Lestrange and the fight with Voldemort and the mass tortures and killings Voldemort and his Death Eaters had taken part in while he was locked away in Azkaban. He lived through every curse cast feeling the pain and agony of the victims, he watched as they raped woman and young girls barely into their teens. He stood motionless unable to prevent the attacks trying to block out their screams and pleads for mercy while they physically beat them into a pulp barely recognizable as once being a human being. His occlumency helped when he meditated but he had forgotten to and the dreams burst forth from the damn that had been holding them back. Harry's pleas were barely audible in the waking world but his thrashing was obvious, although unable to move in his dream state, the muscles of his real body reacted dutifully.

The blackness of Azkaban and his prison cell formed an eerie backdrop to each and every vision. They meshed together forming bizarre scenery. On one level he kept seeing the figures of humans torturing and being tortured or killed. On another level he saw a black wall with glowing writing all over it, but he couldn't understand the writing and when he tried to focus on it, it would fade, only to resurface when his attention was on the people. Somehow the walls were familiar to him. He had seen them somewhere before, those walls were ingrained in his memory, memories he had fought for four years in the other realm to block out. He tried so hard to refuse them status within his mind but they wouldn't be ignored. For some reason they surged forth forcing him to watch.

Finishing in the green house Remus went inside to clean up when he heard something shatter in the living room. Curious, he went to investigate, and was horrified seeing Harry lying on the floor trembling uncontrollably but still asleep. Racing forwards he knelt

down beside Harry and checked for a pulse on instinct. It raced rapidly as if Harry had just run a marathon, his skin was hot and clammy and beads of perspiration gathered across his forehead. Remus turned Harry onto his back and tried to wake him but was unsuccessful. Shaking his shoulders with no response, Remus started to panic, he slapped Harry across the face and was about to administer another slap when he saw his eyes flutter weakly. Shaking him by the shoulders once more he was relieved when he saw the emerald green eyes staring at him. They were glazed over but after a few blinks they were clear and questioning.

“Harry, thank Merlin you’re awake!” Remus said finally breathing again. He picked Harry up ignoring his protests and placed him back on the couch. “Are you cold?” Remus asked after still seeing him shivering.

“Yeah....a..little”

“What happened?”

“Dreams.....memories” he breathed out regaining control.

“Must have been a pretty bad one for you to be this affected by it after waking up.”

“Yeah it was bad”

“Want to talk about it?”

“Not really.”

“Harry, I’ve noticed you have quite a few ‘nightmares’ like this. Doesn’t the occlumency help?”

“Yeah, when I actually meditate before I go to bed, but I .....kinda forgot last night.”

“Harry as I’ve said before, it will help you to talk about it. You can’t keep all your emotions in. Believe me I know.” He added quietly.

"It's hard Moony, I don't think anyone can understand."

"Try me. You may be surprised. It helped before didn't it?"

"Yeah" Harry replied dimly.

"Harry, I've been patient with you so far, and I will continue to be. I don't know how long it will take, but each day I have worried more about you. Do you understand what this will do to you?" Remus asked trying to search Harry's eyes for an answer. Harry took a deep breath and Remus could tell he didn't understand, before Harry could speak Remus raised his hand and cut him off. "Harry, you don't understand. The more you withdraw into yourself, the more lonely your life becomes, you will become removed from others and it will be harder for you to return. You can't live without those that love you in your life. I know, because I have been there. When your parents died Harry I blamed myself. I cursed the day that James and I had ever become friends. It was more painful because I never was able to set things right between us before he died. I knew he thought that somehow I was the spy and instead of confronting everyone about it I left. Thinking that somehow they were right and I wasn't to be trusted, that I had never deserved such friends because I was a werewolf. I know it sounds ridiculous but compare it to what you're doing to yourself. I thought Sirius had actually betrayed James and Lily and killed Peter, I lost everything that day. Betrayed by my friends and unable to go on in life without them. For 12 years I drifted, afraid to confront my life. I was afraid of facing James and Lily, for what they would say about me, for not taking care of you. In a way it helped but it also made it worse. The state you met me in was not just caused by my lack of a job Harry. I didn't care anymore, I blocked everything out and kept my pain to myself. It wasn't until Dumbledore came to me and offered me a job that I was able to start dealing with it. I found someone to talk to and after a time it became easier to cope. I knew when Sirius escaped I had to keep you safe, if only to prove to James and Lily somehow that our friendship was true. In all actuality Harry, I was trying to prove it to myself. So I helped the only way I knew how. Throughout your third year I was able to get to know you better and am very glad of that. Since then I would like to say that we've become very close friends Harry. You have to understand though that I was

where you are now. You have to take the first step and let someone in Harry or you'll wind up even worse off than I was."

"It's so hard Moony! I don't trust any of them, well maybe Ginny a little bit, but I just can't forget everything they did to me. I still don't know what happened to everything I once had. Did they burn my fathers invisibility cloak? What happened to Hedwig, and my Firebolt? I know it sounds pretty petty but they were the only things I had and they all knew how important they were to me. I know that's why they destroyed them. How am I to forgive someone that acts just like Voldemort, who purposely seeks to hurt others?"

"I understand it is very hard for you to just accept everything with your friends. I'm not asking you to forgive and forget. What they did was wrong and so much worse than what I went through. I'm not saying you have to be friends with them again but I would like to see you happy again. Make new friends Harry. I couldn't stand to loose you now and there are many others that feel the same. Whether you believe it or not, there are people that love and care about you, you Harry, not because you're the Boy-Who-Lived, the Boy-Who-Defeated Voldemort, but because you are you." Remus wiped the tears that had been rolling down his cheeks and stood to leave. He paused momentarily next to the couch where Harry sat, looking down at him. The teen had his head drooped hiding any evidence that he had gotten through. Sighing deeply Remus turned and started for the kitchen.

"Moony?" Harry's soft and broken voice reached Remus before the door of the kitchen.

Remus turned and looked at the boy, his heart tightening in his chest. Those emerald eyes stared at him with pain and longing. There were tears forming that he knew Harry was trying to fight back. "It's okay to cry Harry. Although most people consider it a weakness for men to cry, there's not one that hasn't at some point in his life." He said.

Wiping his eyes dry Harry looked up to meet Remus. "Yeah, that's similar to what my mum said. I realize I've been keeping my emotions to myself. Guess I've been more afraid of what everyone was thinking

than I let myself admit. I'm still so angry at everyone. It's almost like those four years never happened in a way."

Quickly making his way back to the couch, Remus sat down next to him and wrapped his arms around the boy. He may have immense powers but he was still a confused teenager that had been through so much and had more to deal with than anyone he had ever known. He pulled him tightly against his chest trying to make the love he felt for this boy show through his hug. Although he knew he could never replace James or Sirius, he thought of Harry as his own and he wanted the boy to know it.

Harry sat silently allowing himself the hug, and after a short time, Harry pulled back and ran his fingers through his hair.

Scrutinizing his friend he sighed, "Death" was the whispered response.

Remus was confused "What was that?"

"Death, that's what my nightmares are about. I saw everything Voldemort did those first months at Azkaban, I witnessed everything!" Now that he was talking about it Harry couldn't stop. "You know how I see my parents dying when Dementors are around?"

Remus nodded not daring to interrupt now that Harry was finally talking.

"Well, I see that, I see Cedric Diggory dying after the Triwizard Tournament, I see Sirius falling through the veil, and then I see the people that Voldemort killed. It's always the same somehow, they all blame me, they curse me before they die for killing them. I can't do anything about it and I know they're right. I am just so tired of all these dreams and crap! So tired of always having to relive my worst memories. What's all this power I have worth if I can't even stop these fucking dreams." Harry stopped wiping away a few tears and controlling his breathing as the memories surfaced once again.

"Harry! You're not responsible for those deaths anymore than I was responsible for your parents death. I know you feel that way but



you're not. Think of all the deaths you prevented by what you have done! Blimey Harry, if you hadn't done half the things you did there would be no hope at all. All the power in the world cannot prevent you from coming to terms with yourself Harry. They'll keep surfacing until you deal with them and accept the fact that you didn't kill those people. You spent time with the Fates, there's a plan for everyone, and as harsh as it sounds, everyone dies."

"Yeah, I realize that but it doesn't make it easier."

"Listen Harry, I'm not saying that it shouldn't hurt that people have died. It should hurt, it shows you care and that your heart is in the right place. You can't stop everyone from dying, but you can stop them from dying needlessly. Your actions and choices are what define you Harry. They might not always turn out the way you want or expect but you have always chosen to act in the best interest of everyone excluding yourself." Remus said as he lifted Harry's chin so they could look into each others eyes. "You did not kill those people Harry. That lies on Voldemorts head and in the end he will answer for it all. I do believe in a higher power, that is how I know that James and Lily are always with me. You have done nothing but try to save those you love."

"But because of my choices ...."

"Because of your choices many people have been able to continue their lives. Because of your choices there is hope that the world won't have to live in constant fear. Don't give up on hope for a better life Harry."

"You're right. I'm feeling sorry for myself and have to get over it. It's just hard being confronted by everyone constantly reminding me about the past."

"Don't I know it." Remus chuckled. "One thing you have to remember is that life is never easy. You have to deal with things Harry. People can't read minds and are most often very bad at trying to relay their feelings. We misinterpret not only what is said to us but how people respond around us. You have to tell them what you're truly thinking. Let them deal with how they react, if they really care about you they'll

understand and be the better for it. If not, well then you've said your peace and can move on. Unless we trust those we love and are able to express our true feelings with them, we will always find ourselves in a vicious circle. All you can do is be true to yourself and others will eventually see it as well. I don't know exactly what you and your parents and Sirius talked about but I'm sure they wouldn't want you doing this to yourself. They gave you more than powers when you were with them Harry, don't forget that."

Thinking on what Remus had said, he came to a decision. "Once again you're right, I've been pretty pathetic lately. Moping around acting like a weak fool."

"Oh you are anything but weak Harry! After all you have gone through you still see how precious life is. Not just human life but all life. It's the greatest gift we have Harry, and you are a very wise young man to see it as such. Look at how you treat the goblins and house elves? They respect you because of this Harry. I've never seen a house elf so happy to serve as Dobby is around you. Look at Griphook at the bank, he showed more emotion than I have ever seen a goblin show when you were talking to him at the bank. He even helped us with those runes. I don't think anyone realizes that there is such a thing as goblin runes, and I could tell he was nearly bursting at the seams when you showed interest."

"That's it!" Harry exclaimed jumping up from the couch and startling Remus.

"What's wrong Harry? What did I say?"

"Moony there was another part of my dream that I didn't tell you about. It hasn't been in all my previous dreams, but it just clicked! Lately I've been seeing a black wall with glowing writing all over it. I couldn't place it until you just reminded me. It was like you unlocked something I've been blocking out."

"What have you been blocking out? And what's with the black wall? Do you think they're more runes?"

"Believe me you'd block it out too. I blocked the first half of my stay at Azkaban, maybe that's why I've been having those dreams. They were dark and painful, but I don't want to talk about that right now, I'm sure you can imagine."

"I understand Harry. So what do you remember about this wall?"

"Well, I now know for sure where it was. It was my cell in Azkaban. I can remember waking up and it being dark and cold and I would concentrate on the walls to try to block out the pain and the memories the Dementors would make me relive. I kept seeing things appearing on the wall and they became clearer each time I concentrated on them. It helped until I was taken to the other realm. When that happened I locked away all my memories of that cell deep within my mind, until recently when I started to dream again. It only happens when I forget to meditate, which hasn't been all that often but.." Harry shrugged.

"Do you think they are goblin runes?" Remus said, excitement building in his voice.

Harry could hear the excitement in Remus voice and could only admit that it was a reflection of what he himself was feeling. "I think they are Moony. They look the same as the ones over my vault door, but I still can't read them. The more important thing is that if what that book I found is correct then we have a bigger problem. Well not a problem really, maybe a solution."

"Okay, now I'm gonna have to read that book. Summary please?"

"Well it doesn't say who wrote the book, but it seemed like a third party. An objective third party, they wrote about both sides the wizards and the goblins without prejudice. Anyway, it talked a little about goblin runes and matches what Griphook said about them being hidden from view and can only be seen by goblins or those trusted by the goblins. It also confirms that these runes are only placed on areas of great importance to goblins. If that is true Moony, then Azkaban at some time must have been under goblin control."

"I'm not sure Harry." Remus said puzzled. "I've never heard of anything like that. For as long as I can remember it has been controlled by the ministry. I think I remember something about it once being the fortress of a strong wizard but I don't remember anything about the goblins being there."

"Don't you see Moony? It all makes sense. Everything you were ever taught, that I was ever taught has been written from the point of view of witches and wizards." Harry chuckled to himself.

"What's so funny?"

"Oh it's just a muggle saying that I just remembered. That history is always written by the victors."

"I don't see what that's got to do with anything."

"Don't you? Everything written by the victorious is always from their perspective. You've seen how wizards and witches act around each other, it's like a constant competition to see who's better, how they can outdo each other. Well, think about it, who would write of their own failures, their own doubts, or even perhaps their own unjust actions. It all makes sense. If the goblins once owned Azkaban and they lost the war and Azkaban was taken from them then why wouldn't the history books speak of it. The only answer is that the history books are covering something up! That's got to be it!"

"I can see your line of thinking. If Azkaban was somehow taken unlawfully, the goblins would have no recourse if it was made to look like it had always belonged to wizards. Does the book say anything about Azkaban?"

"No, but I know there has got to be more. I wonder if Griphook would help us find out more?"

"Well you could always ask him."

"You think he would?"

"I'm not sure Harry, at the very least it would be a touchy subject with them if what you're speculating is true."

"Okay, I think I might just make a visit, want to come?"

"Sure, why not. You've sparked my interest."

"Okay then, see you at the bank." And before Remus could respond Harry was gone.

Harry waited impatiently for Remus to follow even though it was only a matter of seconds. He scanned the bank for Griphook and was pleased when he saw him walk into the hall from a side door.

"Griphook!" Harry shouted.

The goblin was shocked to say the least to hear his name being shouted in the vast expanse of the main hall. Turning around he became a little apprehensive when he saw two wizards running towards him. He looked for a convenient exit and found there were none.

"Griphook. Sorry, but could we talk?"

"Ah Mr. Harry Potter Sir, and Mr. Lupin." Griphook said with obvious relief. "I have a few things to finish off with a client but we can talk after, this should only take a few minutes."

"Of course" Remus stated.

"We'll wait for you here?" Harry questioned.

"No...no...I have a private room off my office where you can wait. I could send for some tea and biscuits if you would like?"

"Thankyou Griphook." Remus said and they followed the goblin to the room.

They didn't have long to wait as Griphook was true to his word and quickly finished his business with his client. Instead of moving to his

office, Griphook joined them in the sitting room. Remus thought this was very odd as goblins never showed this kind of regard for witches or wizards. If business wasn't conducted in the main hall then it was done in private offices, but never in a personal sitting room. Harry didn't think twice about it.

"How may I be of help, Mr. Potter?" Griphook asked making himself comfortable in a small comfortable chair. Remus caught how he addressed Harry right off the bat but kept silent on his observation.

"Well, Griphook. You see it's about that book I found in my vault. The one about goblin history."

"I see.. yes?"

"Well I was wondering if you could.....well that is if there are....." Harry was nervous and not too sure on how to continue.

"We were wondering if there is any other books that might explain goblin history a little more in depth." Remus put in.

Griphook scrutinized the two wizards while sipping his tea, it was an odd sight as no one had ever seen a goblin do this in the company of witches or wizards. Silence dragged while he formed his answer and he could tell the two wizards were coiled tightly in anticipation. Placing his tea cup back on a side table he tapped his long boney fingers on the side of his chair further dragging out the moment. He was pleased that Harry had read the book so quickly, most wizards would have put it on a shelf and forgotten about it, he could only hope that he was correct in his assumptions about the boy wizard.

"Yes there are....other books, but I am afraid that they are not easily acquired."

"What do you mean?" Harry asked with a frown.

"Well you see, our libraries are diligently guarded from...shall we say...unwanted attention. None but goblins themselves and those trusted by goblins even know that these books exist." He watched as

the two men's eyes dropped to the ground in disappointment. "There is a way though it be difficult and will take a lot of trust on your part."

Harry's head snapped back to attention a second before Remus, his eyes sparkling with hope. Griphook masked his amusement masterfully.

"Whatever it takes, I'll do it." Harry said nearly jumping out of his seat. He looked at Remus who nodded cautiously.

"Give me a moment and I will be right back." Griphook said getting up from his chair and leaving the room.

"What do you think that was all about?" Harry asked when Griphook was gone.

"I don't know Harry, but we must be careful. You know feelings between Goblins and wizards are not all that strong, don't expect a welcoming party or anything. Whatever you do watch what you say and how you say it. Goblins are very formal around others and we need to respect that. I'm curious to see what's going to happen but also a little nervous."

"Well it can't be all that bad if he's going to help us can it?"

"He never said he was going to help us Harry. Goblins are very precise when speaking, words have more meaning to goblins than what we are used to."

Griphook returned and successfully ended any further conversation. Harry mulled over what Remus had said. Griphook was very specific about what he said and he thought back to other conversations he had had with the goblin. Never once did Griphook do anything more or less than what he had stated, well except the time he helped him out right after he escaped from Azkaban, but even then he worded what he said very carefully. Yes it was something to remember.

"Please follow me" Griphook said motioning them out the door. With a quick glance at each other they followed obediently. Instead of going out to the main hall, Griphook lead them to the other end of the hall

where two elevators stood. They were exactly like those in the ministry. One came rattling down rather suspiciously and opened. Instead of buttons Griphook pressed an oddly shaped RUNE! There were runes in the elevator. Harry's excitement nearly spilled over when he saw this which caught Remus's attention.

"Harry are you alright?"

"Runes, Moony!" was all Harry could get out. He saw Griphook smile knowingly and soon the elevator stopped. They didn't know what floor they were on, but the hallways were filled with light from the many windows in the foyer they were standing in. It was an inviting area, definitely not like the main hall below. Couches lined the walls below the windows with a few odd plants scattered around. The floor was marble and polished so it gleamed but for some reason it didn't feel as cold and unwelcoming as the floors below did.

"This way please?" Griphook once again motioned for them to follow. Walking out of the foyer they turned right and went down a short ways. In front of them stood enormous mahogany double doors engraved with runes and pictures of what Harry could only guess were from goblin history. It was amazing, the intricate carvings seemed to be alive and as Griphook approached they swung open to reveal a cavernous meeting hall. The center of the room was empty except for two chairs. Up on a dais and circling the room was a continuous table of sorts. Behind the table, chairs could be made out but they were empty. It was awe inspiring like a great tribunal, he could only imagine what this place looked like full. Griphook motioned to the chairs and Remus and Harry took their seats without comment still staring in disbelief around the room.

Remus couldn't believe he was sitting in what he suspected was the Goblin Grand Council Hall. No one had ever set foot in the place except a handful of wizards and witches. Their descriptions didn't do the place justice and he found he was at a loss for words. 'Maybe that's why they couldn't describe it' he thought to himself.

A door opened off the side of the room and a single goblin came forth and sat at the head of the table right in front of Remus and Harry.



"I have been told by Griphook that you have expressed interest in our history. May I ask why?"

Harry looked to Remus for guidance, but unfortunately he couldn't get the man's attention, too wrapped up in the moment, Remus was staring dumbly at the goblin in front of them. Harry gulped and looked back at the goblin and nervously started to explain everything. It seemed like forever had passed but he knew it hadn't. Speaking to Remus about everything was one thing but having to tell a complete stranger was another. Although when he was done he felt better somehow. The goblin, they still didn't know his name, asked many questions about Harry's life, mainly about the incidents with Voldemort and how he was imprisoned. It was painful for Harry to drag up these memories but was supported by Remus who helped fill in certain details. During extremely difficult parts of his tale, Remus had placed his hand on Harry's shoulder in support, which helped him tremendously. Finally the goblin sat quietly contemplating all that had been spoken.

"I thank you for telling me this Mr. Potter and Mr. Lupin. It took great courage for you to be so open with me. You have left me a lot to think about. Do I have your permission to relay the information you have given to the rest of the goblin council?"

Harry gulped audibly and looked at Remus who returned his look but only nodded. "Yes" Harry responded. "May I ask a question sir?"

"Of course Mr. Potter, I did not mean for this to feel like an interrogation." The goblin smiled, but came out looking like a feral grin, it was an unnerving sight and Harry didn't believe for a minute that it was meant to put him at ease.

"I mean no disrespect sir by asking this, but I told you about the runes and was wondering if Azkaban was once a goblin stronghold?"

The head goblin looked a little taken aback by the question and although he felt a slight triumph at making the goblin show an unplanned expression he prayed it wouldn't disrupt the trust they were showing by bringing them here.

"In truth Mr. Potter, that was an unexpected question. Why do you ask?"

"Well sir, I found in the book that I read that goblin runes are only placed in areas of great importance to goblins." He said looking for a response while trying to word his next statement. "And if I saw them in Azkaban as I have told you, then that means that at one point it was very important to the goblin race. I'm curious since none of our history books or lessons have ever mentioned anything about this."

"Yes they wouldn't." The goblin stated plainly showing no emotion. "History does not always speak of the truth. I am curious as to why this interests you so."

"Well sir, I am not sure myself but I do have speculations and a proposition for you if you are interested."

"Please do speak up" the goblin stated leaning forward showing his interest. Remus only looked at Harry not entirely sure where he was going with this.

It was late when Remus and Harry arrived back home, and Harry disappeared into his trunk, it was time to take care of the many death eaters he had captured. The ministry would have a time the next morning sorting it all out. Clearing all the cells he portkeyed them to the empty holding cells at the ministry, with so many there were three to a cell but Harry had gotten all the information out of them he needed and the public would know who they were. Sure the ministry would probably release them rather than go through the trouble of trying to maintain the new prison but if things went the way he planned the ministry wouldn't have to worry about them anymore.

After clearing all the compartments, except for his special guest, he finished packing his trunk with the things he wanted to bring to Hogwarts, and sat quietly on his bed to organize his thoughts. He didn't need anymore dreams especially since he would need his strength on the train ride back to Hogwarts. Who knew what he would encounter during the trip. At midnight he finally let himself fall into a deep restful sleep.

Remus went to wake Harry up the next morning and found the dark haired teen sleeping peacefully. No tossing, no sweating or moaning indicated that Harry had actually slept well and Remus was grateful. He hadn't lied yesterday when he said he was worried. Harry had been through so much and needed the rest that dreamless sleep could grant. He had enough to deal with during his waking hours, and today would be the start of more stressful times. For a normal boy returning to school it was hard enough, being with friends again studying, Quidditch, young love, pranks, these were things normal teenage boys had trouble dealing with. Harry would have this on top of the stress that his fame and notoriety caused let alone the complicated plan he had set in motion. Would the students accept him back? Would they believe that he was innocent? The teenage mind worked in so many mysterious ways and he could only hope that they would support Harry. The stares and whispers would be there, just like they were always there but would they be cruel and unforgiving or would they be something else something more positive. Sighing he forced the thoughts from his mind and went to wake him up.

"Harry. Harry time to get up." He said gently shaking the shoulder of the sleeping form.

"HmMMM, just five more minutes." Harry groaned out.

"Sorry Harry but we have to get to London early remember?"

"Moony please?" he whined.

"Come on sleepy head. Up or I will use more drastic measures. I'll give you to the count of ten.  
1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9....."

"I'm up, I'm up already!"

Harry sat up in bed and rubbed the sleep from his eyes. Remus chuckled.

"Come on, let's get breakfast." Remus said as he walked out of the door.

Once the door shut Harry lay back down on his pillow hoping to get in few more moments of sleep. It was not to be, Remus had suspected this and as soon as his head hit the pillow a large bucket of ice water appeared over the bed and drenched Harry.

“MOONY!” Harry shouted as he sputtered through the water dripping down his face. Casting a drying charm around him and his bed he stormed out of his room.

“Moony, I’m going to kill you for that!” Harry said upon entering the kitchen.

“I warned you.”

“You didn’t have to dump ice cold water on me!”

“How else to wake you up?” Remus said with mock innocence.

“You’ll pay dearly for that. Just wait.” Harry said taking a seat at the table.

“Get over it. Now what would you like for breakfast?”

“Don’t change the subject.”

“I’m only sticking to your plan Harry. You’re the one that wanted to get to the platform early to avoid everyone. You could always change it and deal with the ‘trouble’ as you call it, of dealing with the Weasley’s, Hermione and all the other students.” Remus stated hoping that Harry might change his mind.

“No, you’re right. Let’s just eat and get going, I guess I can sleep on the train.”

“Alright. So here eat up.” Remus handed him a plate full of scrambled eggs, sausage, bacon and toast.

“You’re getting better with this. Seems I’ve domesticated the werewolf.”

“Shut it. You’ve never complained before, so I can’t be that bad.”

They ate a leisurely breakfast and after Harry shrunk all his things they stepped out of the back of the house and apparated to platform 9  $\frac{3}{4}$  to meet the train. They were an hour early and the train was there already so without trouble Harry was able to find an empty compartment to settle into.

“All set Harry?”

“Yeah I’m fine, so I’ll see you tonight at the welcoming feast?”

“I’ll be there. Remember you promised to keep it a secret. No telling anyone.”

“I don’t plan on talking to anyone so that won’t be a problem.” Harry said laying on one of the seats.

“Give them a chance Harry.”

“Yeah, yeah you keep saying that.”

“And I’ll keep saying it.”

“Give me some time Moony. There’s a lot I have to work out.” He sighed.

“I know Harry, but let’s just say I’m acting as your conscience by continuing to remind you to live again. See you tonight.”

“See ya Moony.”

As soon as Remus left the compartment Harry waved his hand and a shade covered the window of the door. Hopefully no-one would bother with the compartment and would leave Harry alone. It was quiet for a while as he drifted off to sleep. All too soon though his sleep was interrupted by the noisy banging of trunks on the train and the rising volume of chatter as Hogwarts students began arriving and meeting up with friends. Keeping his eyes closed and forcing himself

to remain as he was he waited pensively for someone to open his compartment door. No-one did and then the whistle blew indicating that the train would be leaving. He released his breath in a deep sigh of relief that his return was starting out as he wanted. He would have plenty of time over the course of the year to deal with his former friends. The train lurched violently as it started to move away from the station but Harry didn't move. Relaxing back in his seat he tried to go back to sleep.

"Do you think Harry will be on the train?"

"I don't know Ron. Professor Dumbledore may think it best he travel by portkey to Hogwarts."

"Why would he need to do that?"

"Geez Ron, no matter how old you are, you're stupidity never ceases to amaze me!"

"I'm not stupid, Ginny."

"Are too."

"Not again." Hermione moaned rolling her eyes. "You think you two would just lay off each other."

"You should take your own advice Hermione." Gin quipped.

"Ginny!"

"Ah, prefects meeting?" Ron squeaked out, not wanting to deal with the row building up between them.

"Right. Let's go then."

"Fine." Ginny said dropping her trunk in the compartment.

As they entered the prefects carriage all three groaned at the sight of Draco Malfoy lounging smugly at one of the tables.

"Well if it isn't the Weasel, baby Weasel and the mudblood. Missing your pathetic friend Potter aren't you? Or has he forgotten all about you. Oh I forgot, he probably doesn't want anything to do with traitors."

"Shut it Malfoy." Ron threatened while Hermione placed a restraining grip on his arm. All three were stung by the truthfulness of the blonde Slytherins words. It hurt deeply that Harry hadn't met them on the platform. Mrs. Weasley had tears in her eyes after she had searched the platform for him and couldn't find him. The other Weasley's came along in the hopes of seeing Harry but their sullen faces after not finding him showed how disappointed they were. All of them were in a surly mood because of this. They hoped Harry would get over it and things would be like before, they never stopped to think how much pain Harry harbored and who he blamed for that pain. Even though they had witnessed for themselves how much Harry had changed they couldn't bring themselves to admit it.

"Must have hit the target on that one Weasel. Poor weasel must be lost without his best mate."

"Malfoy, you are a slimy little pansy who couldn't even begin to understand anything unless your 'daddy' told you what to do." Hermione chastised.

"You'll pay for that Granger!"

"Yeah, yeah, blah blah, we've heard it all before Malfoy. Must be nice being free after what you did. Pretty convenient isn't it that you were able to get off so easily. I'm sure Daddy isn't too happy with you at the moment since you blamed him for your crimes. I always knew Malfoys were blathering cowards." Ginny boldly stated.

"What would you know about anything baby weasel! At least my family is of great importance to the wizarding world. We have friends and power, where you can barely afford the clothes on your back. Bet you grew up wearing all your brothers hand-me-downs. Do you even know what a dress is?"

"Ginny don't!" Hermione reached out to Ginny to prevent her from hexing Draco Malfoy. "He's not worth it."

"Yeah you're right. At least I know my friends are true and not hanging around me because of money or fear of what my daddy could do to them. I'll wait until later, when there aren't as many witnesses." Ginny ground out.

"QUIET PLEASE PREFECTS!" A voice shouted from the front of the compartment. "Everyone please settle down so we can get this meeting started. My name is Ernie Macmillan from Ravenclaw for those that don't know me. I'm am head boy this year and our head girl is Hermione Granger. Hermione please come up here would you?" Hermione stepped around and through the crowd to join Ernie. "Now we have a few things to go over before we release you all." The meeting droned on as both Ernie and Hermione painfully described the prefect's duties and responsibilities in detail. It was no different from any previous year but being who they were, felt it their responsibility to drill it into everyone's heads forcefully.

Meanwhile Harry couldn't sleep. He felt anxious and had to admit it to himself; he was actually looking forward to going back to Hogwarts. So many things had happened over the last year that he was curious to see how much the school had changed, if at all. The only thing he dreaded was having to walk into the Great Hall and having everyone stare at him again. He could care less what they thought but he wished they would just ignore him. He planned to be one of the first people off the train, catching one of the first carriages up to the school and finding a seat at the Gryffindor table away from everyone else. If he was one of the first people in, maybe no one would notice him. He would have to see Dumbledore after the feast to get access to his new quarters. The old man would probably try to drag out the conversation but Harry would not allow it. He would be short and to the point, something the old man didn't know how to do. He thought of many sarcastic comments he could say to him and chuckled at himself and the imagined conversation. He knew he would not speak them but it was still fun to think about it.

Forcing his thoughts away from Dumbledore he reached out with his senses to see what was going on in his train car. His compartment



was in the middle of the train, something his former friends would never guess as they had always tried to find one at the front or back away from everyone else. Dean Thomas, Seamus Finnigan, Lavender Brown and Parvati Patil were in the compartment adjacent to him but those were the only people he knew by name. The remaining compartments were filled with 1st years and 3rd years. It was amazing how many students attended Hogwarts that he didn't know. Well it was his own fault, he reminded himself, you kept to yourself and the Gryffindors for the first four years not caring about anyone besides your close friends. It wasn't until fifth year when he started the DA that he had much interaction with people from other houses. He briefly wondered what Neville Longbottom was up to when he felt someone enter the train car. Draco Malfoy!

Harry smiled widely waiting for what Draco might be up to. He would love to confront his school nemesis. Draco hadn't taken the dark mark and because of that he was released from punishment. The constant bungling of the Wizengamot and the Ministry enraged him. Once again they did not administer Veritaserum to Draco for the absurd reason that he was underage during the trial. His pathetic act of crying and blathering on about how his father forced him to do the things he did under threat of torture and death won the Wizengamot over. He had seen the blonde weakling rape and kill a 14 year old muggle just for fun, and was physically sick after seeing the crime. He vowed Draco would pay for it, he vowed all the death eaters would pay, and being locked up in a cell wasn't good enough. He wanted them to feel the pain and terror their victims felt and if everything went according to plan they would soon be paying dearly.

As he watched Draco work his way down the passageway the train lurched causing the Slytherin to trip over his own feet. Chuckling, Harry watched as Draco mouthed curse words while he picked himself up off the floor and primly swiped non-existent dirt from his robes. Malfoy stopped when he reached the compartment Harry was in, the drawn shade catching his attention. An evil sneer crossed his face and Harry could feel the boys anticipation. It was a sickening feeling, the boy craved the feeling of terror he inflicted on others. No, Draco Malfoy was not as redeemable as others had hoped. Like father like son definitely applied in this case. The boy pulled his wand

and stepped up to the door hoping to catch the inhabitants unaware and threw the door open.

Harry didn't move from his position. Seeing himself through his senses he looked the perfect picture of one in deep sleep. A gleam lit Malfoy's eyes in pure joy of catching the Boy-Who-Lived off guard.

"Well, well, well if it isn't the famous Harry Potter back from the damned."

"If you're as smart as you think you are you'll leave." Harry said without opening his eyes or moving from his current position.

"Miss your cell Potter? Being alone and in the dark must be reassuring for you. I see you're friends haven't come around. Could it be they still can't stand the sight of you?"

Harry let the comments slide, he knew Malfoy was baiting him and wouldn't give him the satisfaction.

"Potter! I'm talking to you." Malfoy shouted angry at the lack of response he was getting.

"Sounds like babbling to me Malfoy" Harry responded opening his eyes and yawning widely.

"You are nothing but a worthless mudblood Potter. Such a disappointment to the wizarding world, you know not everyone believes you are innocent. You'll be back in that dank cell you miss so much in no time."

"You think so?"

"I'll make sure of it. I'll find whoever helped you get out of there and make sure he won't help you next time. You should be rotting there still. I didn't go through all that trouble so that you could escape. Father should have removed Fudge a long time ago, but no matter, he's no longer around to mess things up. We won't make the same mistake again."

“You forget Malfoy the only reason you’re not rotting away in a cell right now is because of your cowardice in blaming your father for your deeds. Next time you won’t get off as easily.”

“There won’t be a next time Potter, I’m going to make you suffer. No one will believe you.” Malfoy threatened and raised his wand to point it at Harry’s head.

In an instant Harry had transformed to his Dire Wolf and Malfoy found himself flat on his back held firmly to the ground by an enormous and sharp clawed paw. Harry curled his claws inward digging into Malfoys chest just barely grazing the skin under his expensive robes. He heard Malfoy whimper in fear, his eyes wide. Harry leaned his head down to within inches of Malfoy’s face and snarled at him. His large sharp teeth bared he growled deeply at the boy and was satisfied at the cry that escaped his mouth.

“Pl..please don’t eat me.” Malfoy stumbled.

The Dire Wolf tilted his head considering the plea. Using his telepathy Harry said, “Eat you? I don’t like the taste of rotten meat which is so prevalent among Death Eaters.”

Malfoys eyes hardened upon hearing the voice in his head but was still too afraid to move. Harry could tell Malfoy was forming a smart comeback but cut him off.

“This is the last chance you’re going to get. If you bother me, if I even hear the slightest rumor that you have done anything to anyone in the school you will wish I had killed you now.” He transmitted to the evil mind.

Harry transformed back to his human form and eyed the motionless form before him. With a smirk he noticed that Malfoy had wet himself from the terror of his encounter. Careful to use his wand, he didn’t want to reveal all his secrets, he flicked it at Malfoy and sent him flying into the passageway where he could hear cries of concern. The growl he had made as the Dire Wolf must have been heard by all in this train car. He followed Malfoy into the passageway and noticed students peeking their heads out of their doors with looks of fear on

their faces. They were cautiously trying to make sure they were in no danger. Looking down at the now unconscious form of Draco Malfoy, Harry banished him to another compartment where someone else could take care of him.

“What?” he asked turning to the students staring blatantly at him. He couldn’t tell if they were shocked at seeing him or about what he had just done.

“Harry?” A soft voice quietly questioned from one of the doorways. Harry looked over to see Dean, Lavendar, Parvati and Seamus staring at him in disbelief.

Harry only nodded and turned back to his compartment.

“Harry how are you?” Dean asked timidly.

“I’m fine Dean.” Harry said looking over his shoulder at his one time dorm mate.

“Harry you could join us if you want.” Parvati asked shakily.

“No thank you, I have better company to keep.” Harry said straight faced and left them with their own thoughts.

The rest of the journey to Hogsmeade was uneventful and Harry meditated finding it very relaxing after his encounter with Malfoy. Before the train had come to a complete stop he had opened the door and jumped onto the platform quickly to find a carriage to Hogwarts.

“Harry!” someone shouted from behind him but he ignored them and the excited whispers that started and jumped into the first carriage. It was slow to take off and he was worried that the person that called his name would catch up to him. Luck was with him at that moment as the Thestrals quickly got into a rhythm that they couldn’t keep up with. Sighing he sat back trying to relax, he was feeling anxious and the closer he got to Hogwarts the more nervous he felt at being in the presence of all his former classmates.

Arriving at the front of the castle Harry quickly disembarked from the carriage and ran up the steps to the large castle doors which swung open to allow him entrance. Shooting a glance over his shoulders he could see other carriages arriving and picked up his pace to get to the Great Hall. It was empty, he had successfully arrived before any students or teachers. He quickly sat at the end of the Gryffindor table closest to the head table where the professors would sit. Without anything to do his nerves were becoming overworked so he pulled out his trunk and grabbed a book out of it to read. It helped keep his mind off the students he could hear entering and finding seats of their own. Soon the noise level in the Great Hall was overwhelming. He could catch glimpses of conversations going on all around him, discussing their adventures over summer vacation. How he longed for a normal life! He wished he could talk about trips to the beach, or going to Quidditch matches or traveling the world, but he was Harry Potter, arch enemy to Lord Voldemort, savior of the wizarding world, for him there was no such thing.

A door opened off the side of the hall and the teachers entered causing a change in the noisy chatter amongst the students. Harry glanced up and caught Remus' eyes, he smiled and felt better when it was returned.

"Is this seat taken?"

Harry snapped his head around to see who was talking to him and caught his breath.

"No it isn't."

"Do you mind if I sit here then?"

"It's a free country." Harry shrugged and returned his attention to his book. He didn't want to start up a conversation, least of all with Ginny who he was still slightly mad at for the other day.

"Why didn't you meet us before you got on the train. We could have shared a compartment."

"Because I didn't feel like being around anyone."

“Oh, do you still feel that way?”

Harry knew from the tone of her voice it was a loaded question. He turned to face her. “Yes.”

“Fine then, I’ll just go sit somewhere else then if you don’t want my company.” She said and got up to find another seat.

Harry only felt slightly bad for being so rude, she was only trying to be friendly but he couldn’t help it. He watched her sit down next to Collin Creevey and her other sixth year friends. His eyes scanned the rest of the table and he noticed that Ron and Hermione were seated towards the middle of the table shooting furtive glances at him unsure of what they should do. Figuring they were not too confident of his reaction they chose the safe way of avoiding him. There was a large gap between him and the rest of the Gryffindors. Usually the head of the table where he was sitting remained open for first years to sit after the sorting. Harry didn’t care and focused on his book. He heard the doors open again and the quiet murmurs of the students in the upper years as they watched the scared first years walk in a gaggle up to the head table. He was vaguely aware of the sorting hats song, the solemn silence after it was done and the small cough Professor McGonagall made to divert everyone’s attention back to the sorting. He could feel the eyes on him and was grateful for the diversion. While everyone watched the sorting of the new students Harry continued reading his book. It was a defense book that he had read several times through but concentrating on the words helped him tune everyone out. Dumbledore stood up and with two words food finally filled the tables. Conversations died down in the hall to a low hum as they all stuffed their faces with the excellent fare.

Harry ate sparingly, he wasn’t all that hungry, his nerves were still strung tightly. His thoughts now drifted to how he was going to get to his new room without having to deal with his dorm mates or fellow Gryffindors.

“Welcome back students to another year and to those joining us for the first time. Now for a few start of term notices,” said Dumbledore. “First years ought to know that the forest on the school grounds is out

of bounds to all students. A few of our older students would do well to remember this as well. Mr. Filch, the caretaker, has asked me to remind you that magic is not permitted in the corridors between classes, nor are a number of other things to include the entire product line from Weasley's Wizard Wheezes. For a complete listing you may check the list on Mr. Filch's office door.

"We are pleased to welcome back Professor Lupin who will be returning to the post of Defense against the Dark Arts." The hall erupted into an enormous round of applause for the best teacher they had ever had in that class, all except for the Slytherin table who glared at the head table. Dumbledore continued, "Tryouts for the House Quidditch teams will take place during the third week of term, team captains are reminded to reserve the pitch with Madame Hooch. On a more solemn note we would like to welcome back one of our students, who we all owe a sincere apology to for the unjust way in which we treated him. We welcome back Harry Potter."

Harry was taken aback and stiffened at the speech Dumbledore was making, he could feel all eyes on him again and the thunderous clapping, but didn't know how to respond. He was angry at the Headmaster for doing this and knew it was another of his manipulation attempts. Instead of looking around at the students he slowly turned his head and gave a quick almost imperceptible nod to the headmaster then returned to his book. He missed the troubled look that flashed on the headmaster's face and the rest of the professors. He didn't care, he just wanted out of there right now.

"Prefects please show the first years to their dormitories. Sleep well." And with that the hall erupted in noise as students filed out to the shouts of 'First years over here....follow me..' Harry waited until the hall was almost completely empty then made his way up to the head table where the teachers were also making their exit. Dumbledore remained stoically in his chair waiting for him.

"Harry, I assume all is well?"

"Yes sir. I just came to get the password for my room."

"Ah yes. It is located behind the portrait of Godric Gryffindor in the Gryffindor common room. The password is 'Pheonix Fire' you will have to arrange any changes with Miss Granger as the head girls rooms are also located in the same area."

"Thank you sir," Harry said and turned to leave.

"Harry, I would ask you to join me in my study tomorrow evening at 7 o'clock to discuss extra lessons."

"What extra lessons?" Harry said turning to face the man.

"We need to continue your occlumency training and I dare say some others as well to ensure you are up to speed after the year you have missed."

"I thought my tests were enough to prove to you I wasn't behind. As for occlumency training, I don't need it."

"Ah, well we shall see. Professor Snape..."

"What's Snape got to do with anything?" Harry snapped.

"That's Professor Snape, Harry, and he has expressed his concern about your link with the dark lord and how it might impact the students. We feel it imperative that you resume your training to block him from your mind."

"I will not be taking any extra lessons with 'professor' Snape, sir. You can test me if you like, but the only lessons I will be having with that man is potions."

"Harry I must insist that you take these lessons for your safety as well."

"You may insist all you want, but I will not be taking the lessons. You were never concerned about my safety or wellbeing before, why should you pretend to now. I do not need, nor do I want any special lessons you feel necessary. I am only here to finish this year and get



my N.E.W.T.s. I dare say the school governors would be quite upset if they learned you were giving special treatment to a student.”

“Harry I....”

“No headmaster. No one will be manipulating me again, I am in control of my life, no one else. Not you, not Snape, not the order! I can look out for myself!” Before the headmaster could say another word Harry turned around abruptly and stormed out of the hall. Once out in the corridor he walked purposefully up to the Gryffindor tower.

“Welcome back Mr. Potter, it’s nice to see you again.”

“Yeah right,” Harry said to the portrait guarding the common room. He stopped, realizing that he didn’t have the password, he would have thought it comical to be in this situation as a pattern was forming except that it reminded him of the year he spent in Azkaban. Just then the portrait swung open to let a 3rd year out and he grabbed the side of it before it closed. The 3rd year looked at him strangely, but Harry just stepped around him and through the opening. The common room was packed with Gryffindors idly chatting or playing games of exploding snap. He groaned rolling his head at the sight. Couldn’t he have gotten through this without having to deal with all these people. It had started out just fine from the train, now he would have to wade through all these people and try to avoid their questions. Bracing himself he straightened his shoulders and strode over to the picture of Godric Gryffindor and spoke the password. The picture swung open and he entered once again ignoring the gasps of surprise. Once inside he made his way over to a door on the left side of the short hallway that had a plaque on it stating ‘Mr. Harry Potter.’

Entering his new room he was pleasantly surprised to find a nice double four poster bed at one side of the room. At the other was a round table with two chairs for studying. Against the wall was a fireplace with a fire already roaring sending its heat throughout the room. Situated off to a side was a small but comfortable couch. To the side of the fireplace was a door, he walked over to it and opened it to find his own private bath, it was small but held both a shower and a bathtub, the water closet was set off to the side providing a great deal of privacy. He was pleased at this unexpected addition as he

didn't have to use the common baths or worry about the prefects bath. He could study in here without being bothered by anyone else. He quickly took out his trunk and started organizing his things around the room. He realized he had more books than the small shelves in his room could hold so he only put out the books he hadn't read yet storing the others in his trunk. He also kept his more questionable reading material stored in his trunk to avoid any questions that might be asked should they be seen, not that anyone would be in his room, but he didn't want to take any chances. Looking around once again he was pleased with the result and slipped into a pair of silk pajama bottoms and sat on his bed to meditate before going to sleep. He would need his wits about him tomorrow for the first day of classes, and if things went as they had in the past he was pretty sure he could count on potions being his first class of the day.

## Chapter 11 No More Potions

Waking early, Harry dressed in his workout clothes and set out to get in a workout before breakfast. As usual the common room was empty this early in the morning and he thanked his lucky stars. The corridors were empty as well and he made it out to the lakeside without any trouble. It was peaceful just like the river near Hogsmeade, he could make out the dark form of the Giant Squid moving through the water as the sunrise peeked over the horizon. He was quickly lost in the motions of his katras and didn't notice that someone was watching from high up in a window of the castle.

As the sun rose higher a couple hours later, Harry finally finished his workout and headed back into the castle to shower before breakfast. He could hear the beginnings of the castle inhabitants waking up as he slipped into his private room and wondered how he was going to get through the day. He wanted to wear his new robes but decided it would cause less grief if he followed the rules and wore his school uniform; he opted for wearing his armor under his clothing. He wouldn't be caught off guard or unprotected.

Slipping out of the common room unnoticed he made his way down to breakfast sitting in the same place as he had the night prior. Soon students began to fill the hall not one taking any note of him which he was thankful for. Professor McGonnagal came in and started to make her way down the Gryffindor table handing out time tables. Just as he thought, potions was the first class of the day.

"Harry?"

It's inevitable he thought. "What is it?"

"Um, we were just wondering if we could, um, sit with you?"

"Go ahead, I was just finishing Hermione."

"Oh, well what class to you have this morning?"

"Potions"

“We could walk with you if you don’t mind.”

Harry looked up to see Hermione, Ron, Ginny, and Neville looking at him with hope in their eyes. What they were hoping for he couldn’t fathom, but he relented. “Yeah sure.”

They sat quickly eating like he had never seen them eat before. They were shoveling food down so fast he thought they would choke if they didn’t slow down. “Are we late or something?” he asked.

Ron looked up mid-bite, “No we have plenty of time, why?”

“Well you’re all shoveling food away like there was no tomorrow. I was just curious as to why?”

To his amusement they all blushed furiously.

“Uh hem, sorry Harry.”

“What’s there to be sorry about Neville?” Harry asked frowning.

“Uh well, you have been avoiding everyone since the train and we, um just wanted to make sure well that you didn’t take off again.”

To say he was surprised at Neville’s upfront and honest answer was an understatement. When did Neville gain so much confidence? Although it surprised him he was grateful for it and pleased that Neville had grown up and gained some confidence. “I won’t, I’ll wait for you.” He replied. “Please slow down, I don’t want anyone to choke.”

“What other classes you taking?”

“Well, I’m taking potions, charms, transfiguration, healing, Defense against the dark arts, and care of magical creatures.”

“We’ve got most of the same classes, except I’ve also got herbology.”

“Yeah Neville’s going to be a healer, has to know the properties in potions and all.”

“What are you going to do Ron?”

“Auror of course, spent all summer taking remedial potions at the ministry so I could get into Snapes class. I just hope the slimy git leaves me alone. I can brew a decent potion as long as I’m not distracted, and Snape’s a master at distracting a bloke.” Ron said stuffing a sausage into his mouth.

“Really Ron, you’d think by now you would know how to ignore him.”

“It’s not that easy ‘Mione. You saw him last year! Geez, I didn’t think anyone but Slytherins would complete his class, he’s so unfair.”

“Well he’s never given us any reason to think he was ever fair. My Gran hired a personal tutor over the summer for me so I could get through the class. She says it’s a matter of knowing how to deal with your enemy. You’ve got to work around their rules instead of forcing them to yours. Confusing really, but Miss Saleth helped me a lot.”

“Good for you Neville, I’m not too excited about Snape myself but I know my potions abilities are up there and will enjoy seeing the look on his face.”

“Harry how..” Hermione questioned then stopped herself horrified at what she was about to ask.

“I know what you were going to say Hermione, I have my ways.” Harry answered cryptically. “I think we should get going though, we have only 10 minutes to get to the dungeons.”

Ron tried to shovel in a few more bites as they all stood up from the table, after gathering their things they headed off to class, a tense atmosphere enveloped the foursome and conversation was sparse as no one knew what to say.

“What’s this? Potheads found his weasel and mudblood?” Draco drawled from his small group of Slytherins outside the door to the potions dungeon.

"Shut it Malfoy," Ron glared at the blonde.

Hermione also glared, Harry leaned casually against the stone wall, arms crossed in front of his chest.

"Think you're so special Potter! You must have really missed those two to cheat on your tests just so you could be in the same classes. You'll find it won't be so easy."

"Whatever you say Malfoy." Harry yawned. Ron and Hermione turned their attention to Harry at Malfoys lies.

"Harry, what's he talking about?" Whispered Hermione.

Harry shrugged, "Guess he found out my test scores and isn't happy about the fact that he's no longer the top grade in potions anymore. Sad really, when your life's worth is based on where you rank on exams. Don't you agree Ron?"

"Um yeah, right." Ron said shrugging and shaking his head. He didn't understand what Harry was getting at, he was hinting at something. He never used to do that!

Hermione caught Harry's meaning and pursed her lips together in annoyance. Although Harry had said that looking straight at Malfoy she knew it was meant as much for her as for the Slytherin.

"Why are you all still outside? Ten points from Gryffindor for blocking the door! Now get inside and take your seats, I will have none of this foolishness in my class!" Snape in all his glory, not that there really was any, flicked the door open with his wand, which he also knew was locked, and stormed into the classroom robes billowing behind him.

Harry sat at a table at the front of the class, Ron and Hermione took the table behind him, still gazing at him curiously trying to figure out his new attitude.

"Uh, Harry, you mind if we sit together?"

“Sure Neville, have a seat.”

“Thanks,”

“Quiet! You have all proven yourself worthy, that is most of you, of continuing your studies in NEWT potions.” Snape began critically eyeing the students, only lingering a short while on a dark haired green eyed boy. “In this class you will learn the finesse required for advanced potions. I will not tolerate anything less than perfect results when you hand in your work. Your assignment is on the board, you have three hours to finish. Begin!” Snape turned on his heel and swept up to the front of the class. Briefly he turned around to ensure his students were beginning their work and then sat down at his desk engrossing himself in grading parchments from summer work.

Most of the class proceeded uninterrupted. The animagus revealing potion they were working on was difficult but with the silence Harry and especially Neville felt at ease and were progressing flawlessly. Malfoy on the other hand kept glaring over at the Gryffindors in a childish attempt to distract them from their potions. He was becoming more frustrated as the class drew on. The Slytherins were the only ones in the class whispering to each other, but it went unnoticed by the biased potions master. Hermione and Ron were working closely together and also found that they weren't having a difficult time with the task.

The moment they reached the critical part of adding the powdered basilisk tooth to the potion Draco struck. Neville was measuring the powder carefully and began pouring it into the cauldron, when Draco passed Pansy Parkinson a small piece of lead filing. She pulled her wand out unseen and levitated the lead over to Harry's table to drop it in the potion.

Harry's senses alerted him to magic being used in the classroom and he sought out the source. While others were oblivious to the lead floating through the air, Harry immediately recognized the danger. If the lead were to touch any of the potions brewing in the room, it would explode emitting a toxic gas that would cause those nearest to bleed internally upon breathing it. The gas would dissipate quickly as it wasn't long lasting but if no one noticed what had happened, it

would be hard to treat the affected individuals. Harry only hoped that Snape had an antidote on hand, if not, well that would be Draco's problem. Raising invisible shields, he blocked his side of the room off from that of the Slytherins. The lead would not get through the shield and he watched intently as Pansy struggled with her attempt to get the lead through. Glancing quickly up at Snape he saw the man ignoring the situation. Undetected Harry entered Snape's mind, Snape actually knew what was going on!

Snape was purposefully focusing his attention away from the events going on in the classroom, he knew what the lead would do. Harry could feel the nervous anticipation running through Snape's mind and was enraged. He knew Snape was petty and held an unwarranted grudge against him, but to blatantly allow injury even death? Harry pulled himself away from the evil mind and focused on the lead that was trying fervently to get through the barrier. Transforming it to gillyweed he sent it quick as lightning back to the cauldron of Draco and Pansy.

An enormous explosion erupted through the silent dungeon causing everyone to jump away. Screams echoed off the walls as people ran to get out of the way. A bright light emitted from the cauldron but then was sucked back down into it and only sizzled furiously. Draco and Pansy who had ducked under the desk behind them cautiously crawled out and began to peek into their cauldron.

"What is the meaning of this. 50 points from Gryffindor for sabotaging Mr. Malfoy and Miss Parkinsons potion." Said Snape jumping up angrily from his desk. Harry noticed he didn't move any closer to the cauldron in question.

"Gryffindors had nothing to do with it." Harry stated calmly.

"10 points from Gryffindor for arguing with a teacher." Snape shouted.

"Oh we could go on all day like this, 'sir', but you see both Malfoy and Parkinson were trying to sabotage our potion with lead and seeing as the result would have been more disastrous, and the fact that you knew they were doing it..."



"I'm warning you Potter! Another 10 points!"

"BLOODY HELL!" Ron shouted distracting both Snape and Harry from their argument.

"Ron, ssssh." Hermione whispered then screamed when she saw what Ron was looking at.

All eyes shot to the cause of their outbursts. Draco and Pansy were being attacked by the contents of their potion. No longer a simple liquid; long slimy tentacles had emerged from their cauldron and had snaked their way around the pair completely binding them from head to foot and were trying to pull the struggling teens back into the cauldron.

"Potter, you will put a stop to this right now!" Snape demanded.

"Why? You're the one so willing to see a student injured, or do you just want to see someone other than a Slytherin in harms way?"

"I will not tolerate this! You will release them now."

"Harry stop this," Hermione said looking in horror at Harry.

"Oh would you have rather seen Neville or myself bleed to death because this incompetent allowed those two to play around in class?" Harry growled his eyes now blazing with a fury none had ever seen before.

"You will release them or so help me...." Snape growled raising his wand and pointing it at Harry.

"What? What will you do Snivellus?" Gasps erupted at Harry's insolence. Harry didn't need to see their faces to realize the fear that swept through the room.

"What did you call me?"

"Harry please stop!" Hermione said stomping her foot on the ground.

Harry ignored her, this had gone too far and he wasn't going to let Snape off this easy.

"You heard me."

"Headmasters office now!"

"Whatever you say professor" Harry said, and with a wave of his wand all his things were packed and his bag was slung over his shoulder. He turned to march out of the classroom fully expecting an attack from behind.

The rest of the class, too horrified to move, darted their eyes back and forth between Harry, Snape and the struggling Slytherins. The tentacles even though they had bound the two were not strong enough to do anything else to the pair and Harry knew it. He also knew that Snape could set it right, but for some reason he was trying to force Harry to do it.

Harry reached the door and was about to grab the handle when he felt a close presence, knowing it to be the potions master Harry waited. Snape reached out to grab the back of Harry's collar but stopped dead in his tracks, hair standing on end and smoldering as a sharp painful electrical current swept through him lighting his nerves on fire.

Snape backed up a couple steps and raised his wand to the impudent boy intent upon teaching him a lesson. The smell of burnt hair now filled the classroom and all the students turned to find the source. Snape was standing behind Harry, whose back was turned to Snape, and his normally greasy hair stood straight up with curling wisps of smoke coming off them. He took several steps back and once again raised his wand to the increased horror of everyone. Still they couldn't move as the scene unfolded before them. Then Snape winced and dropped his wand which was glowing red on the floor. Harry turned to look at Snape with an eerie grin then opened the door and left the stunned crowd behind him. Halfway down the hall he could hear the classroom erupt into noisy chaos. He heard the purposeful footsteps of Snape behind him but he marched straight through the halls intent on seeing the headmaster about this.

Reaching the stone Gargoyles he didn't stop, for some reason he already knew the password and as he said it, the gargoyles sprang to life moving aside to reveal the hidden staircase. Instead of waiting for the moving stairs to bring him up to the office, he took them two at a time and noisily banged on the door for entrance.

"Come in"

Harry pushed the door open and strode forward until he was right in front of the headmasters desk.

"Harry, what can I do for you, I would ask what you are here for, but as I see professor Snape has also joined us, I gather there is some problem that needs to be resolved."

"I wish to report professor Snape to the board of governors!"

"What was that Harry?" Dumbledore showed the slightest surprise before covering it up.

"Headmaster, I sent this impudent boy up here for disrupting my class and causing serious injury to two of my students."

"Is this true Harry?"

"I am not the one causing harm sir, this...this..imcompetent, petty death eater allowed two of his Slytherins to attack Neville and myself. I only protected us and gave them a taste of their own medicine."

"YOU LIAR! I saw what you did to their potion...."

Harry had had enough, he waved his hand and Snape froze in mid sentence. He stood frozen in time snarling at Harry. Why couldn't he ever give him a break? What had he done that warranted Snape's unfathomable animosity? The only way he knew how to fight it was to smother it in his own anger. The snarl fixed upon Snape's face was a bitter reminder of everything he had been through in the past year and those feelings were threatening to overwhelm him. He couldn't let them, he had to maintain control. Clenching his eyes tight to block the

unwelcome emotions he breathed in and then turned his attention to his headmaster. He noticed Albus watching him intently, trying to figure something out.

"Harry, I cannot condone your actions upon Professor Snape. You will release him at once. I will speak with Professor McGonagall about your punishment for this. In the future I expect you to control your anger and.."

"No headmaster, you will listen to me!" He shouted and saw the grey eyes cloud over in an emotion Harry had never seen in the headmaster before, a look that most wizards feared, but he didn't care. Harry was outraged that Dumbledore would automatically assume he was at fault and would accept punishment humbly. He had been punished too many times for things that he did not do. They wouldn't listen to him, thought he was some unruly child. Had they forgotten all about Azkaban? What did they think that everything would return to normal? "The unquestionable faith you have misplaced in your esteemed potions master has continued for far too long and has just crossed the line. He knew Draco and Pansy were trying to sabotage our potion but ignored their attempt. It was a piece of lead professor and I'm sure even you are aware of how devastating the effect would be if I had let it continue. I transfigured it to something a little less harmful and forced it back to their cauldron as a little lesson. Snape, and don't give me that look, because he is no longer a professor of mine. He decided to ignore his Slytherins indiscretion and blame me for it, he tried to curse me for it as well and was not successful. I will no longer take class with this slimy excuse of a teacher. I'm sure the only learning that goes on in there is how to keep from getting docked points from your house. I don't require anything that man has to teach."

"Harry I must say that your accusations are unwarranted. I have never had any other complaints from any of the other students. I realize that you and Professor Snape have a certain dislike for each other but he is a trusted teacher Harry."

"So it comes down to that does it? You don't trust me? Well the feelings mutual sir. I don't know what Snape has done in the past to deserve such unwavering loyalty and trust from you, but I do know

that I also have never given you a reason not to trust me. You on the other hand have provided me with plenty, not the least being imprisoning a 16 year old boy in the worst hell imaginable for a crime he didn't commit without a proper trial or even questioning the evidence or testimony provided by false witnesses."

Dumbledore hunched his shoulders forward in weariness; Harry's jibe had struck deep. The old man pinched the bridge of his nose trying to think but found he couldn't. "Harry I..."

"No, I've heard enough!" Harry growled. He swung his hand and Dumbledore's silver Pensieve floated out of a nearby cabinet and settled gently on top of Dumbledore's desk. "I believe you know that memories placed in a Pensieve cannot be altered. I assure you that I have not undergone any memory charms recently." Harry placed his wand to his head and pulled a silvery tendril away and placed it into the Pensieve. Without asking he pointed his wand at Snape and whispered "Legilimens." Dumbledore rose from his desk to protest what Harry was doing but before he could say anything Harry had already found and removed what he was looking for.

"I realize that you do not approve of me removing Snape's memory without his permission. But as I'm sure you have noticed lately, a lot of people seem to think my actions are questionable. As you so eloquently stated during my trial, 'I have given him more lenience with rule breaking at school than I should have.' Yet isn't it ironic that all those times I supposedly broke the rules, you were well aware of the circumstances without needing to be told?" Harry glowered at the headmaster, he could tell his words were having a great impact on the old man. He was being caught in the tangled web he had woven over the past two decades and his discomfort was obvious. Harry placed the strand of memory from Snape into the Pensieve then tapped the liquid in the bowl quickly with his wand. "I believe you will find two points of view for the same story, and dare I say you may not like what you find from 'Professor' Snape's memory." Harry snarled then turned and walked out of the office, as he reached the door he gave a flick of his wrist and Snape fell forward into the chair in front of him before he realized what had happened. Harry could hear the ranting of his most hated professor through the closed door as the moving stairs carried him slowly down to the main hall. Snape could

scream all he wanted; never again would that greasy ill tempered, insufferable, deranged nitwit have the chance to chastise him unchallenged again. The next time Snape had the itch to come near him, the man would get a shock worse than he already experienced, Harry thought with a laugh.

Since he had already missed his care of magical creature's lesson he decided to go to the library for a little light reading, he chuckled to himself at the memory that brought back to him about Hermione, but just as quickly blocked it away. Instead he concentrated on his plans for the future. He had a meeting with the full goblin council to figure out and then from there the Wizengamot. He had to be very careful how he would go about this and spending time looking up ancient wizarding laws seemed like a good place to start. Finding several promising books he sat down at an empty table ignoring the stares he received from the other students in the library. He found the books were actually very interesting, but when he heard the noise level rise within the library he assumed that class had ended and it was time for lunch.

Reluctantly he walked up to Madame Pince with the books.

"May I check these out please?"

The serious librarian just stared at him like he had a second head. He coughed to break the silence and she seemed to snap out it.

"They are due back in a week. I trust you know and will obey the rules for checking these out?"

"Yes ma'am," Harry answered, knowing just how much the elderly lady prized the condition of the books in her care.

"Hmmm" was all she answered.

Placing the books carefully within his bag he set off for another silent lunch. He knew he had to get over the past, but he couldn't trust anyone, especially those that had turned their backs on him. With the way they were acting now it would be even harder. They were still quick to judge his actions without thinking. He wouldn't take it

anymore and if they didn't want to hang around then so be it! This was one of those days where he questioned his own sanity in deciding to return to Hogwarts. Shaking his head he entered the Great Hall and found a seat away from the rest of his schoolmates. Eating quickly he raced out of the hall and out onto the castle grounds just in time to miss his friends coming down from the common room.

Afternoon classes seemed to improve his mood slightly. Of course the rumors were traveling fast about what happened in portions that morning but he ignored them all and concentrated on the task that Professor McGonagall put to them. It was simple really, conjuring buttons was no problem, at least not for him. He noticed Hermione's exasperated attempts and Ron's half hearted ones. He could feel Hermione's glare when he had yet again conjured another black button. Looking down at the pile in front of him on the desk he was momentarily surprised to see about 20 sitting there. He realized he was extremely bored and started playing with his buttons, making them stand on edge and spin. He had all of them spinning and dancing around the desk top.

"Mr. Potter, I see that you have successfully completed the assignment. Since there is still time left, please help the other students in their efforts," she said secretly hoping this would help Harry get over his withdrawal from society.

Harry understood was she was attempting and didn't appreciate her meddling.

"MR. POTTER!" his professor shouted after he hadn't responded for several minutes.

"Sorry professor, I was thinking," Harry responded snapping back to the present. He could feel everyone staring at him now.

"I see that Mr. Potter, now if you don't mind?" she said gesturing to the class.

Harry got up from his seat and looked around, he really didn't want to prowl the room helping people, he just wasn't in the mood. Sighing to

himself he started walking up and down the rows not really paying attention, he caught fragments of conversations going on but blocked them out. It seemed like an eternity and was greatly relieved when the bell rang signaling the end of class. Racing down to his desk he gathered his belongings and headed out the door before anyone could stop him and continued on to charms class hoping there would be no repeat.

Choosing a seat at the back of the room in Professor Flitwicks lesson ensured that he would not be noticed. Watching Hermione and Ron out of the corner of his eye he could tell they were not at all happy with him for sitting without them but he shrugged it off.

Although the banishing spell they were reviewing was easy for Harry he could tell that others were still having problems with it. He could sense Professor Flitwicks scrutiny of his work but purposefully mispronounced the incantation.

"Well Mr. Potter, you just need a little work on that pronunciation there. Your wand movement however is flawless, keep practicing."

"Thank you sir," Harry smirked and continuing practicing even though he was extremely bored. Several times he practiced banishing with his left hand using his wandless magic, but only when he was sure nobody would notice. He was anxious to get out and use his full extent of magic. It was building up inside him and needed a release. All these simple spells and charms weren't cutting it and he desperately needed to practice.

His thoughts turned dark again upon thinking about how he wound up like this, Azkaban. If it weren't for the Fates and the other realm he wouldn't even be here.

'Concentrate on your parents and Sirius, they love you, you have good memories from that time! The Fates were there to help you and were kind to you, everyone in the other realm was! You have to remember that!' he told himself and it worked. 'Really Azkaban wasn't so bad considering most of the time you were in the other realm. Yeah the first several months weren't pleasant but look what came after! Don't think of why you were there!'



Once again the bell rang and Harry headed off to his room to be away from the crowds of students. He felt them crushing in on his thoughts and needed to be alone, he hadn't been around so many people in a long time and it was a little overwhelming to be thrust into it again.

He prided himself on successfully avoiding everyone on his way back to Gryffindor Tower and was in the middle of meditating on his bed when he heard a knock at his door. Ignoring it he continued his meditation, but whoever it was, was being persistent.

"Harry, come on open up!" Hermione yelled.

"Hey mate, you'll miss dinner if you don't come out." Ron's voice shouted through the door. Hermione must have given him the password to get into the Head's dormitory. Obviously Ron was hungry, he never missed a meal, unlike yourself, he thought. Looking over at his clock he realized he had been in his trance for two hours, he was still feeling the effects of so many people but he decided he did need to eat.

"Hang on! I'll be out in a minute," he said swinging his legs off his bed and slipping his trainers and robe back on.

"Hurry up Harry!" Ron's insistent plea sounded.

Harry had to laugh, some things never change! Shrinking his Firebolt and slipping it into his pocket he headed for the door. He found out upon returning that everyone had forgotten that it was locked in the dungeons after Umbridge had left the school. Professor McGonagall had returned it to his rooms with a note expecting him to rejoin the Quidditch team. That wouldn't be happening however, but he did plan to do some flying after dinner since tryouts hadn't started yet and the pitch would be free. He couldn't wait to get out there by himself with nobody around.

"Keep your knickers on Ron, let's go," he said to them opening the door.

“Hey Harry, thought you were going to stay in there all night,” Ron said as they walked into the common room.

“Oh Harry, did you get the assignment from Professor Snape?” Hermione interceded.

‘Always worried about homework that one!’ Harry thought.

“No I didn’t Hermione, and I won’t need it either.”

“Why not Harry, I mean you really can’t afford to have Professor Snape even angrier with you after today.”

“You don’t get it do you Hermione,” Harry said feeling the anger again, “I don’t give a rats ass about him and his bloody assignments!”

“Harry language!” Hermione responded offended, Ron laughed.

“Hermione, get one thing straight. Neither you nor Professor Dumbledore or Professor Snape can tell me what I can or can’t do, that includes how I talk. If you don’t like it, well then you don’t have to hang around me!” He said.

“Harry, that was uncalled for mate!” Ron said abashed at Harry’s rudeness.

“I really don’t care Ron! I’m tired of everyone telling me what to do! Especially those that really don’t care!”

“We all care about you Harry,” Hermione said on the verge of tears.

“So now all of a sudden you care!” Harry said in exasperation throwing his hands up in the air to emphasize his point. “Why didn’t you care a year ago when I really needed you?” he questioned softly so only they could hear him. “Where were you when I was being tortured every single second of the day by those damn Dementors? You knew how they affected me. Where were you when they wouldn’t let me testify let alone give me Veritaserum to prove myself innocent? Where were you then, tell me please ‘cause I really don’t understand why my two best friends, who are supposed to know me better than

anyone else, could turn on me so easily, could believe I would commit murder!" Harry stated his voice breaking. Before either could answer he stormed out of the portrait hole and ran down the stairs to dinner.

"Harry! Harry! Stop, Wait Up!"

Harry only stopped running when he reached the doors to the Great Hall, he didn't want to cause another scene where everyone would start staring at him again. He wanted to eat then fly, he didn't want to talk, it seemed that he couldn't hold a normal conversation.

"Geez, Harry! What's the rush?" asked Ginny as she finally caught up to him. She was out of breath from trying to run after him and he felt a tinge of guilt for causing that.

"Sorry, Gin, didn't hear you." He shrugged it off.

"Yeah, I believe that, and Fred and George are Angels!" she replied looking up at him with mock innocence.

Harry chuckled, "Okay, I'm sorry, but I really don't feel like talking to anyone right now. I just figured....."

"Harry you can be so thick sometimes you know that?" Ginny interrupted.

"What?"

"Did I ever say anything about talking? I just thought you might like to sit with someone while you ate instead of looking like the school outcast."

"That's not funny Gin."

"I didn't mean it to be. You have to admit Harry that your self induced solitude is getting a little old. Everyone's so afraid that you're gonna bite someone's head off if they even come near you."

"I told you I don't want to talk to anyone."

“No one said you had to Harry, but it doesn’t mean you have to sit by yourself all the time. Now do you want some company or not?”

Harry thought about it for a moment and agreed with Ginny. “Okay, yeah, I guess.”

“Well I guess that’s better than I expected. Let’s get a seat then.” Ginny smiled up at Harry.

Harry smiled back thinking about how bright her face became when she smiled. They found seats and Harry noticed that Ginny was right again, when he caught the fearful glances of those around them. Hermione and Ron came into the Dining Hall and shot a nervous look at the couple before bravely taking the empty seats beside them. The tension was there, but it wasn’t as bad for some reason. Every time he looked up he was reassured by the smile that lit Ginny’s face. He appreciated her efforts through dinner and after a while started to relax. It wasn’t to last however, when Ron and Hermione started bickering over some useless topic. He couldn’t imagine what he had ever seen in those two to make him want to be friends with them, they were very annoying.

“I really need to be alone now, if you don’t mind.” Harry said as he got up and headed out of the castle to the Quidditch pitch deep in thought.

Pulling out his Firebolt he was nervous at first, he hadn’t flown in over two years since that evil Umbridge woman banned him, but he also felt the rising anticipation for that wonderful feeling of freedom and exhilaration that it brought. Taking a deep breath and closing his eyes he rose slowly into the air, a little overcautious in his control of the broom. Taking it slow, he made several laps around the pitch, his elation growing rapidly stronger. With his fifth lap he let go, he zoomed up and down between the goals racing faster and faster, he soared up into the clouds and performed flips and barrel rolls and all kinds of acrobatics totally giving himself over to the freedom of flight. The wind whipped through his hair and he loved it, further increasing his ecstasy. There was absolutely nothing like it in the world!

Stopping high above the earth he peered down and the small outline of the pitch below. Performing a back flip in the air he pointed the handle of his broom straight towards the earth and raced downwards. His speed increased and he urged it faster still, the moisture was ripped out of his eyes as he sped closer and closer to the ground, his chest tightened in the ever familiar feel of anticipation. A few meters from the ground he started to pull out of his dive, being a little out of practice he misjudged his timing, but pulled up harder on his broom as he approached the ground. At last he pulled level with his feet dragging against the tips of grass that covered the pitch. His stomach threatened to lurch into his throat but he was able to force it down, his heart beat rapidly and he punched his fist into the air, happy beyond measure that he still had it in him. He could still fly and he was happy, happier than he had been in a long while, all his cares seemed to be gone and he was just a boy on his broom who loved to fly.

He was so lost in his world that his senses didn't pick up the fact that someone was near. Someone that was just as happy as he was. Someone who had tears rolling down their face at the sight of his happiness. Grabbing herself into a hug she disappeared back into the castle before he discovered her.

## Chapter 12 Letting One In

The next morning Harry felt good, he had gotten a good nights rest after exhausting himself flying and meditating again. Now he just wanted to get out of the castle in the crisp morning air to start exercising. He couldn't let himself get out of shape and the best time was in the morning before breakfast. Slipping out of the common room and through the deserted halls he was amazed at how quiet the castle was. During the day it was so full of rambunctious teens that you could barely hear yourself think. He reveled in the peace of the moment as he walked out onto the grounds and to the lake.

The sun was just peeking up over the horizon and he stopped to take in the beauty of it before stretching his muscles. He ran several laps around the lake testing his endurance before stopping. Judging it to be at least another hour before breakfast he took off his shirt wiping the sweat from his face then throwing it to the ground. He started his katras again feeling his muscles flow through the familiar movements. After some time he felt a familiar presence and found it to be Remus.

"What are you doing out here Moony?" he said without breaking his stride.

"Came to see what you were up to so early in the morning."

"Well as you can see I'm training."

"Yes, I see, but how are you practicing your magic and sword play?"

"Haven't figured that one out yet. I was thinking about it the other day and it worries me."

"Why is that? Aren't you keeping up with the rest of your classmates?" Remus furrowed his brow in concern. Everything that Harry had told him would indicate that he would have no troubles, so why was he worried.

"No, it's not that. It's more like I'm bored silly." Harry said completing his routine and putting his shirt back on.

“Oh, not challenging enough, that’s good.”

“I fail to see how that’s good Moony.” Harry said walking over to the man.

“Well I thought you were really having trouble keeping up.” He said sheepishly. “If your problem is boredom I think we can find a way around that.”

“Really? What do you suggest?” Harry laughed at Remus’ embarrassment.

“Well you’re already coming out here to work out before breakfast and you have a couple free periods now, as I’m told since you stopped potions.” He said with a raised eyebrow. “Since you’re out here we could use the pitch to practice some dueling without anyone noticing.”

Harry caught the look Remus was giving him and knew he was expecting an explanation as to why he dropped potions.

“Sounds like a good idea. As for potions and free periods, it’s not like I really needed that gits lessons anyway. I’m assuming Dumbledore told you about class the other day.”

“Yes he did. I must say Harry you have to learn to control your emotions, it’s your weakness you know.”

“Moony I’m not really in the mood for another lecture on how immature I am. I got enough from Dumbledore the other day and quite frankly I’m tired of him standing up for that slimeball.” Harry said starting to storm back to the castle.

“Harry hang on a minute, you didn’t let me finish.”

“What?” he said whipping around to face the werewolf. “Are you going to tell me that I’m still only a child and take that bastards word over mine too?”

"Calm down, cub! No I'm not, but this is precisely what I was talking about. Look at you! Your magic is flowing out of you so fast from your anger I can actually see it. You have to control that Harry. It's your edge against Voldemort and his followers, they underestimate you and have no idea of the power at your command, but if you let your emotions control you, you'll loose. Oh and you're right, Snivellus has always been a slimy git."

Harry suppressed a chuckle. Realizing the truth of his words Harry fought the anger and calmed himself. "Sorry Moony, There's so much more to deal with here than at the Shack and I hate having to wait for my plans to come to fruition. I could focus easily there without worrying about everyone else."

"I know Harry and I think it's a good idea that you are coming out here to work out. It calms you, but you have to go further now. I believe your workout doesn't give you the same peace as it did before?"

"You're right it doesn't, I find myself meditating more and more just to block it all."

"Has it occurred to you that maybe you might find more relief if you talked to them about it, faced it head on as though it were."

"Yeah, and I'm working on it Moony. It's getting a bit old that you keep bringing that up. I will work it out in my own time. There isn't really anyone here I trust. The others, well, let's just say they haven't changed in the slightest."

"How about Ginny? You seem to be the most relaxed around her."

"Yeah but if you didn't know she's seeing someone."

"You're wrong there Harry. I heard from Ginny herself that her and Dean haven't been dating since the end of last term. Seems she was having some problems this summer and Dean couldn't handle it so he broke it off. Ginny of course was unhappy about it, but she got over it quick enough from Molly's perspective."

"Really?"



“Yeah. So what do you say, ask her to talk with you.”

“Yeah maybe I will.”

“Come on cub, let’s get you washed up. I don’t think anyone would appreciate the stench you’re giving off right now while they were trying to eat.”

Harry sniffed himself in mock disdain. “I don’t know what you’re talking about Moony, I can’t smell anything unless you’re talking about that awful cologne you’re wearing.” Harry said punching Remus in the arm then tearing off over the grounds to the castle laughing.

“You’ll pay for that cub!” Remus laughed and strolled leisurely to the castle doors thinking about what he could practice with Harry.

Harry ran up to his room and quickly showered and changed into his school robes intent upon catching up with Ginny before anyone else. He could hear the students bustling throughout the tower and knew they would be heading down shortly for breakfast. Pushing aside his fears he walked into the common room and took a seat in one of the comfy chairs by the fire to wait. He was becoming very agitated with the shocked comments from the other Gryffindors upon seeing him sitting in the common room.

“What? This is my house too, I’m allowed to sit here.” He stated to no one in particular. His comment shut everyone up, but they continued to stare at him openly as if he was a Slytherin that had just waltzed into the room.

“Enough of this, I’m outa here.” He said rising from his chair and turning to leave.

“Harry?”

Harry spun around to see the very person he was waiting for.

“Ginny! Thank Merlin you’re here.”

“What’s wrong Harry? Are you okay?”

“Yeah, let’s just get out of here.”

“Sure, where we going?”

“I thought breakfast would be a good start.” Harry smirked.

Ginny punched him playfully.

“Ow!” Harry yelled rubbing his arm pretending it hurt. Ginny just rolled her eyes and grabbed him by the arm pulling him out through the portrait hole.

“So what’s on your mind?” She asked as they started down to the Great Hall.

“Well a lot actually.”

“I figured that much.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well honestly Harry. You, waiting for someone down in the common room when you’ve barely spoken to anyone since we came back.”

“Yeah okay, I get it.” Harry felt his stomach fluttering and the nerves creep in. He ran a hand through his hair trying to hide his nervousness, but Ginny saw through it.

“What’s wrong Harry?” she asked stopping him from walking and pulling him closer to the side of the corridor.

“Well, I.....can....”

“Spit it out already.”

“Geez, I’m trying alright! I’d really like to talk with you later if you don’t mind that is.”

“Sure Harry. I have a free period before lunch, where would you like to talk?”

“I was thinking we could meet in the room of requirements?”

“Okay, I’ll meet you there. Do I get any warning of what this talk is going to be about?” she said continuing down the hall with Harry following.

“Things” he muttered looking at the ground.

Ginny looked sideways at Harry and noticed how uncomfortable he was. She only hoped that the ‘talk’ would be about what she thought it was. Maybe he was going to open up a little, she prayed he would, but at the same time couldn’t help being fearful of what it would bring. She also had to wonder why he chose her to talk to before Hermione or Ron.

“So I heard about potions yesterday, is it true you set Snape’s hair on fire?”

Harry chuckled at her change of topic. “No, not really, it only smoked a little,”

“So why’d you do it?”

“Well he was ignoring the fact that Malfoy was trying to kill Neville and me so I turned their prank around. I transfigured the lead they were trying to shoot into our potion to gillyweed which had the most unexpected reaction to their potion.”

“I’m sure it did, although I’m not so sure about the unexpected part. I strongly believe Mr. Potter you knew exactly what was going to happen to that potion.”

“Caught in the act!” Ginny giggled which lightened Harry’s burden and he smiled at her, a genuine smile.

“So did they really attack Malfoy and Parkinson?”

“Yeah, if it hadn’t been for the seriousness of the situation and Snape’s reaction, I would have been rolling on the floor in laughter.”

“I heard he tried to get you expelled.”

“That and a few other things, the sneaky coward tried to attack me from behind after he ordered me out of class to Professor Dumbledore’s office. He actually had the nerve to say that I was being an arrogant spoiled brat for following his directions then he attacked me. Well, I blocked his curse and retaliated with an over exaggerated shock spell that made his hair smolder. I think it was all that grease. He tried to grab me and I blasted him. Then I went straight to Dumbledore’s office and he believed Snape over me. I couldn’t believe it, after everything that’s gone on he believed I caused all the trouble, so I threatened to go over his head and report Snape directly to the board of governors and refused to take another class with the bastard. Oh sorry.” He said trying to apologize for his use of language.

“No worries Harry. You know just as well as I do that I’ve heard worse. I’m no Hermione you know.”

“I’m so glad.” He stated relieved at that statement for more than one reason.

Ginny looked curiously at him and how relieved he looked. “I think I’ll take that as a compliment Mr. Potter.” she said sitting down at the Gryffindor table while he sat beside her.

“Didn’t mean it any other way.” He smiled at her and began shoveling food onto his plate eagerly.

Ginny watched him pile food onto his plate and then shoveling it into his mouth as if he would never eat again. She had to wonder about that as he never seemed to eat that way before..... ‘Did he pick that up in Azkaban?’ she wondered. She felt a wave of sadness wash over her as he continued to eat oblivious to his surroundings. Her heart went out to him for what he must have gone through in there. She vowed that nothing would ever harm him again as long as she

had any say in the matter. Sighing she played with the food on her plate not really hungry anymore.

“Don’t worry Gin, it’s not that bad.” He said as if reading her thoughts. “Perk up, here comes Hermione and Ron.”

“How did you know they were coming.”

Harry pointed to his head and smiled at her. “Sensed them coming, picked up their auras coming into the room.”

So maybe he wasn’t that oblivious! When...How....did he learn to do that? The expression on her face must have given her thought away to him.

“I’ll explain it later, but you might want to fill that pretty mouth with food instead of flies.”

She quickly shut her mouth that she didn’t even realize was hanging open. She ate in silence the rest of the meal going over what Harry had said to her and what he hadn’t said. Something was definitely going on here and she would figure it out. Soon everyone was leaving for class.

“Gin, I’ll see you later?” He asked cryptically.

She nodded her head and he left for his morning class, a double period of Herbology. She sighed and got up to go to her Divination class not really in the mood to listening to Trelawney’s hype for today. She cursed Ron for ever suggesting to take the class. She didn’t know how, but she had received an Outstanding in her OWLs in the course so decided to continue it. Since Firenze the Centaur taught every other class it wasn’t so bad but today was Trelawney, another day of sitting in the hot, incense filled room. The sickeningly sweet aroma made her stomach lurch every time she had to go in there but she grinned to herself knowing that afterwards she only had Care of Magical Creatures with Hagrid then she would be seeing Harry.

Herbology wasn’t too bad as Professor Sprout had them extracting the juice from the Shepherd’s Weatherglass. The juice she explained

would be used in a strong purifying draught that would cleanse the body of most plant induced poisons. It had several other names and Harry recalled exactly what it was and its uses when she stated that it was also known as the "Blessed Herb". His mother had taught him about that. It had several other uses that most wizards and witches didn't know about but his mother did. She had experimented with it while working as an unspeakable. When mixed carefully with Dragons Blood and rubbed onto the blade of a knife it purified and empowered the magic within. He had done this to several of his own blades since escaping. Neville of course excelled in Herbology but was still as clumsy as ever and by the time class was over, everyone was trying hard to keep from giggling at the scarlet colored liquid that stained his robes.

Harry had no time to stick around, he had a rendezvous to keep and felt the excitement building within him. If it weren't for his heightened senses he would have crashed into a snarling Snape near the Great Hall. He had to be coming from the Headmasters office, but right now Harry didn't really care to think about it. He raced on to the third floor and upon turning the corner he found Ginny sitting outside the picture of Barnabus the Barmy waiting for him.

"Hey Ginny, glad you're here." He said smiling broadly.

Ginny couldn't resist the smile that spread across his handsome face. She loved his smile, his true smile, when his happiness shown through it. She smiled back trapped within the headiness that was overwhelming her at the sight of him.

"Should we go in?" She said standing up.

"Hang on a minute," he said screwing his brows in concentration as he began to pace back and forth in front of the portrait three times. After the third pass a door appeared and Ginny grabbed the handle opening it. Inside she found a nice comfortable sitting room with a small fluffy couch in front of a roaring fire. Several bottles of butterbeer stood upon the coffee table in front of it. It was nice and cozy and was just the place she imagined Harry would be at home in. Looking to the side at him she smiled then entered the room to take a seat on the couch.

"You like it?" He asked unsure.

"It's cozy. It reminds me of the Burrow."

"Yeah me too," he said a little downcast at the memory.

"What's wrong Harry? Why the long face?"

"Just what you said about the Burrow. I believed I would never be welcomed there again after what happened." Ginny's face fell at the hurt and pain that crossed over Harry's face, but it was his eyes that showed the true pain of that statement.

"Harry what can I say? I'm sorry! We didn't know, didn't realize anything beyond our grief." She said looking down at her hands clasped tightly in her lap. "Percy never did reconcile with the rest of us before he died. It hurt more because of that. It makes sense now knowing he joined V-Voldemort, but it didn't then. No one knew why Percy went to your house that night. That was the biggest sticking point for me, but since everyone was so sure that he had a reason I didn't bother to question it until this summer. Every time I brought it up it caused more trouble so I kept it to myself until you escaped. Then everything came out into the open. I can't tell you how terrible it made me feel that I was such a coward, that I didn't have the courage to stand up to everyone and voice my own doubts. I was scared, scared of losing my family. Sometimes I wonder why I was ever sorted into Gryffindor." She ended quietly tears slipping down her cheeks. She wiped at them furious that she couldn't control it.

Harry sat down beside her and listened. He could understand her fear of losing the ones she loved, having to face life on her own with no support. That was the story of his life!

"I know how you feel Gin, and I don't blame you for it. I only wish things had been different. I wish I could have had a normal life without all the responsibility that's been placed on me."

Ginny watched him speak to his hands the same way she had done and her heart felt like it was breaking. She had heard a few stories

about his home life but realized that no one really knew how he had lived. There was something he wasn't telling her but decided it was better not to push him. Instead she reached out her hand and placed it over his in a gesture of support.

Harry felt her hand and inwardly sighed, it felt good to be touched like that. He had only experienced a loving touch a few times in his life, he had longed for it throughout his life but only received harsh rebukes. His relatives only provided constant pain both mentally and physically. It wasn't until his stay in the other realm that he new what it was like to be loved by family, being hugged or have someone console him. He clasped her tiny hand between his marveling at how delicate her fingers were, she had nice hands, loving hands, hands that would never lash out in anger, would never hurt him.

"The Burrow was the only place that ever felt like a true home, like I had a real family. Then every thing changed in the blink of an eye." His voice cracked and he became silent.

Ginny could she the inner turmoil he was going through just to get those few words out and it pained her to know she had been a part of the cause of it. "I'm so sorry Harry, I didn't realize. We all thought of you as part of the family but I guess it didn't show it after that night. Oh Harry, we were so wrong to believe that you of all people could've done anything like that. You were always there protecting and saving us. We failed not only our own honor by betraying the wizards debts we owed you but we cast aside one of our own. I don't know how you can, but I hope you can forgive us." She cried and launched herself at Harry hugging him as if her life depended on it.

Harry didn't know what to do, he was struggling so hard to keep from breaking down in front of Ginny that he was caught off guard when she flung her arms around him. Immediately he felt warmth he had only known in the other realm with his parents and Sirius. It flowed into him and broke through the already weak defenses he placed around his heart. He grabbed her tightly to him and cried out his anguish. He didn't realize he had that much bottled up inside him. He thought he would never cry again after breaking down with Remus but the emotions were too much to handle. He clung to Ginny like a lifeline drawing her warmth into him, her strength, her hope for a



brighter tomorrow. She utterly amazed him and he realized the depth of feeling he had for her.

They cried for a long time not caring about classes or anything else that was going on in the outside world. This was too important to both of them. When their tears calmed Harry withdrew from Ginny reluctantly, there were still things they had to talk about and he wanted to get them out in the open.

A faint scent of jasmine and orchids drifted into his senses. He buried his head deeper into her soft red hair and was overwhelmed with the scent. 'She must wash her hair with something that smells like that' he felt silly for thinking that but for some reason it only increased the pleasure of being around her. He had never smelled that before and it gave him the feeling of freshness and love.

"Ginny, there is something that I have to tell you." He looked at her as she wiped the remaining tears from her face and nodded. "I don't know really where to start." She giggled and he wondered where that came from.

"The beginning is always a good place silly." Harry smiled.

"I know you've heard some stories about how I grew up, but I don't think anyone really knows or understands. If they did I would understand why they thought I could be capable of murder, but as it is they don't."

Ginny gasped, not entirely sure how to take that comment. Harry looked at her unsure whether to go on.

"Please Harry go on, I 'm sorry but I don't understand what would make you say that."

"For as long as I can remember I always longed for a real family, a family that truly loved me. I couldn't understand why the Dursley's hated me so much. No let me continue. Since I was around 5 I was made to cook and clean around the house for my 'relatives'. I never had a room of my own until I returned from Hogwarts after my first year." He sighed gathering his strength to continue.

"Where did you sleep then?" Ginny asked puzzled, she thought she remembered Ron and the Twins saying they rescued him from a bedroom on the second floor.

"Up until that time I slept in a cupboard under the stairs. It was my paradise as well as my hell. At night I could rest relatively well away from my Aunt Petunia, Uncle Vernon and Dudley, but sometimes it was a prison. I was punished constantly and shoved into the cupboard so they could forget about me. There were many times I prayed that someone would come take me away when I was little. I was told that my parents died in a car crash that they had caused from drinking too much. I was told they were terrible, irresponsible people who didn't care about me and didn't love me. They said I didn't deserve to be loved and for a long time I believed them. I accepted the punishments they dealt me thinking I deserved everything I got. Hagrid had told me the truth about my parents when he came to give me my Hogwarts letter. Anything was better than being with the Dursley's so I went. When I met Ron, my first friend ever, and saw your family, I questioned everything I had been led to believe. The Dursley's weren't happy at all with me going to Hogwarts and tried to 'beat the abnormalities' as they called it, out of me every summer I returned home. I think I have a medical record 10 kilometers long from visiting the muggle emergency room so many times, but no one ever questioned what happened. Aunt Petunia always had an excuse for my clumsiness or my penchant for troublemaking. That's why I don't like being in hospitals all that much. They even made sure everyone on the block thought I attended St. Brutus's School for Criminally InsaneBoys, that ensured no one ever talked to me or asked unwanted questions. When we would return home, they would lock me in my room for days to heal on my own."

"That's horrible! How could they do that to you!" Ginny shouted outraged at his treatment. Harry spoke as if it really wasn't him that experienced the abuse, as if he was a third party looking at the life of another. His voice held to expression to it and his eyes were glazed over staring unseeing into the fire.

"Hate's a pretty powerful weapon Ginny. The Dursley's hated me, they did everything they could to let me know that, but I kept hoping

that some day they would love me. I never had any friends, my only cousin terrorized me and anyone that might come near me at school. I was punished for doing well and my Aunt had the teachers believing what a terrible brat I was. My uncle beat me and called me a freak, my aunt screeched at me and treated me lower than a house elf and then I find out about my true life. I show up here and find out I don't know anything about my family. Shocking really, when so many people know more about you than you do. I find out that a psycho madman is after me and won't stop until I'm dead, who has already killed my parents and hundreds of others just so he can claim he's the king so to speak. I risk my life and that of my friends over and over until I get my godfather killed then get sent to Azkaban by the only people I loved as family. I won't go into the first several months there, it's too painful, way beyond anything my relatives ever did to me. I thought I was going to die, I wished for it, prayed for it really until one night I had a vision different from the ones that plagued me from Voldemort."

"You still had visions from Voldemort?" Ginny was appalled at what that implied. He must have witnessed so much death.

"Yes, only this time he didn't hold anything back, believing I was powerless, which I really was at the time, he brought me into his mind to see everything he saw. But that one night it was different," he said changing the subject from Voldemort, "It was like a bright light that enveloped me, and I could feel myself leaving my body. I thought I was finally dead and thanked the powers that be for releasing me from the hell of my life."

"Oh Harry" Ginny sobbed, placing her hands over her face.

Harry was quiet for a few moments remembering the experience. "I felt myself rising into the air and out of the prison, I kept going and thought finally I was going to see my parents. I was correct in that assumption but I wasn't dead. The bright light continued to glow until I was blinded by it and could feel it burning my skin. Then all of a sudden it stopped and I opened my eyes. I think I fainted when I saw who was standing in front of me, but that's not important. Sirius, and my parents were there, as real as we are here, they explained things to me and helped me get over the shock of being transported to

another realm. It's like Dumbledore said once, "Death is only the next great adventure." Well he wasn't too far off by saying that. I was introduced to the 3 Fates and was trained by anyone willing to help me. For 4 years I lived there and healed and grew. That's where I gained all my power, if it weren't for them I would be dead and living with them permanently right now watching this world be destroyed by the evil of Voldemort. I couldn't let that happen so I came back to finish it."

"Harry that's amazing! But how.....when....what are they like?"

"Who?" Harry said turning his head from his hands to look at her.

"Your parents, what was it like seeing them, to be able to spend time with them and Sirius? You know I still miss him."

"It was wonderful. I have never been so happy in my life. It was like all the prayers I made as a child were answered. My mother is brilliant, so kind and loving but very stern when she wants to be. She also has a mischievous streak and can hold her own against both dad and Sirius at their best. She taught me what love is and helped me get over a lot of issues. My Dad is great! He's nothing like what Snape keeps trying to insinuate. We talked a lot about their time at Hogwarts and why things happened the way they did. I can't say as I agree with their methods but I can't blame them either. From what they showed me of their memories, Snape was ten times worse than Malfoy. We talked about a lot of things and I got to know them all really well in the 4 short years I spent with them. Sirius, Dad and I had a prank war going on and I left while ahead. I really miss them. I try to remember the conversations we had about me coming back and wish I had listened more. I promised them I would get over my anger and hatred for all of you. I'm trying but it's so much different dealing with it in person than just talking about what I would do. Then I come back to find out that not only had I been framed and betrayed, but that those I had once loved and respected had been stealing from me. I found out that Dumbledore had been doing it since my parents death. Just for that I don't think I can ever forgive him. I have so many plans in place right now and it's a little overwhelming trying to deal with those, then add on top of it seeing everyone again."

“I’m sorry about the money Harry. I knew it wasn’t right but I didn’t refuse anything that was given to me. Please tell me how I can make it up to you?”

“I don’t think there is a way Gin. Everyone keeps saying how sorry they are for what happened but none of them actually mean it. They still act the same old way expecting me to do the same, but I can’t go back to that. They still don’t see how much I’ve changed or even try to accept it. During the trial you didn’t do or say anything to me and I believe that’s why it’s easier for me to talk to you. The others, well, they have a lot to atone for before I accept them in my life again. I’m trying but it can’t be one sided.”

“I know you’re trying Harry and I’ll stand by you. You know Neville never thought you were guilty either. There are quite a few people that think that way Harry, but they were afraid like I was to say anything.”

“That’s great to hear Gin. What a mess! I really wish I could go back and talk to my parents again.”

“Maybe you should get a Pensieve like Dumbledore has and review the memories of those conversations. I don’t know if you can go back but it help you feel closer to them.”

“That’s actually a really good idea. Surprised I hadn’t thought of it sooner.”

“Well I can tell you have a lot of emotions that you are trying to deal with. I know it’s not easy but I appreciate the effort you’re putting into it. Even though the others might not be able to see it, I can tell how much you’re struggling inside. You may be able to hide the emotions you’re feeling behind that blank mask you wear but it shows in your eyes Harry. That’s where I see your true feelings.”

“Have to work on that then, don’t want to be giving away any advantage.”

“Don’t you dare Harry. I won’t tell anyone, besides I like having an advantage over everyone else when it comes to you.”

“What’s that suppose to mean Miss Weasley?”

“Don’t worry about it for now. So what was it like meeting the Fates, did they let you see how this will all turn out?”

“No, the Fates still have to keep their secrets, but they gave me the time to grow that I didn’t have here. I thought I had come to terms with everything there but being around everyone is so much different.”

“I understand that, it’s how I felt after the Chamber.”

Harry shook his head breaking his thoughts at that statement. He had forgotten about that, how could he? He had shrugged it off like he had shrugged off so many things without realizing how it affected others. Of course Ginny would understand, she had dealt with Tom Riddle herself and it was horrifying.

“I’m sorry Ginny,”

“What’s there to be sorry about? You saved me from Tom and that Basilisk. I don’t think I ever thanked you for that. So, thank you.” She said meekly.

Harry placed his hand under her chin and gently lifted her head so their eyes met. “No Ginny, I’m sorry for not being there for you after the chamber. I totally brushed you off not caring how it affected you. I should have been there for you. I remember Ron saying that you had nightmares but we really didn’t talk about it any more than that. I was such an idiot, so wrapped up in myself and my problems that I couldn’t even see what you were going through because of me.”

“It’s not your fault Harry James Potter. I will not have you blame yourself for every wrong that happens in this world. It just doesn’t work like that. Just because your blood relatives treated you like crap doesn’t mean the rest of us should dump our problems in your lap as well.”

Harry laughed at her fierce outburst. She crossed her arms across her chest angry that he found this funny. "I don't see what's so funny!"

"That temper of yours is just.....priceless...it reminds me so much of your mum."

"Well I am a Weasley you git, and if you don't stop laughing I'm going to have to introduce you to my Bat Bogey Hex. You've got until the count of 5. 1.....2.....3....."

"Okay okay...remind me to never piss you off again." He struggled to keep from giggling.

"So why do you think you're responsible for every bloody human on this earth?"

"Well it has to do with the prophecy." Harry said returning serious in an instant which startled and unnerved Ginny. Harry relayed to her the events after the Department of Mysteries and the prophecy that Trelawney had made about him and Voldemort. He could tell she was devastated by the news and stood up to pace around the room.

"I'll understand if you don't want to have anything to do with me now." He said resting his head against the stone hearth of the fireplace. He didn't hear Ginny get up and walk over to him until he felt her arms encircling his waist. He looked down at them in awe not knowing what this meant, until he felt her head rest against the center of his back and she squeezed him slightly.

"Harry James Potter, how dare you say such a thing! You're never getting rid of me. Whether you like it or not, I'm here to stay."

Harry felt immense relief and joy from her simple but heartfelt statement. He turned in her arms and embraced her lovingly resting his cheek atop her head. She pulled back so she could look into his eyes and she found she was drowning in those emerald pools that were now so full of emotions. She marveled at how quickly he could mask himself, but for now he was showing it all. He leaned his head towards her and all she could think was that he was finally going to kiss her. His eyes were hooded with a passion she had never seen

before and she responded molding her body with his and lifting her head to receive his kiss. She felt the brush of his soft lips against hers and felt a spark ignite within her. It filled her completely causing her heart to race, she needed him desperately.

Harry had never felt like this before, he had the unrelenting urge to kiss her and he couldn't break free. No it wasn't that he couldn't, he didn't want to, he wanted to feel her lips, her body close to his, he never wanted to let her go. As his lips brushed hers innocently he felt a fire burning deep within him that quickly consumed his thoughts. Breathing heavily he gave in to the feelings and leaned down once again to take her lips against his. It felt wonderful, not necessarily like the fireworks everyone talked about, it was, how to explain it, much better. He was engulfed in a pleasant burning sensation that sent tingles throughout his body. He could feel Ginny responding which only served to increase his pleasure. Even though nothing had been said he could feel her response, her need for him. He pressed against her harder and their mouths opened to each other exploding the passion between them when their tongues gently caressed each others. They broke apart when the need for air became too strong.

Ginny hung in his arms unable to move properly from the sensations still pleasantly cascading through her body. She looked up at him and saw his still passion filled eyes staring back at her.

"I should have done that a long time ago." He said huskily.

"Yes you should have" Ginny giggled at him to which he quirked an eyebrow in response. She pulled away and led them back to the couch where they sat gazing into the fire holding each other and kissing until they fell asleep.



## Chapter 13 Plots Abound

"Professor Dumbledore!" Minerva McGonagall screeched as she walked into the headmaster's office.

"Ah, good day Minerva, lemon drop?"

The deputy headmistress wrinkled up her face in disapproval at his jovial manner. "Headmaster do you know where Mr. Potter and Miss Weasley are? They seem to have gone missing since before lunch."

The headmaster chuckled at this, he had his suspicions about the two. "They have not left the castle grounds Minerva, I do not believe there is cause for concern."

"But Albus they have not shown for their afternoon classes and no one has seen them, surely you must understand the significance of this."

"They are not in any danger Minerva." He said, blue eyes twinkling mischievously.

"How can you be sure?" she responded, her voice filled with worry.

"Ah, I have my ways, I would know if anyone left the school or was in any danger."

The surly transfiguration teacher didn't look like she believed him with her frown and pursed lips but knew there would be no further information forthcoming from the headmaster. "Well then, am I to understand that they will be returning to classes tomorrow?"

"Yes, that is correct, and I will be speaking to them after breakfast tomorrow to deal appropriately with punishments for their truancy," he smiled that aggravating twinkle shining in his eyes.

"Fine," Professor McGonagall huffed and walked out of the office.

Dumbledore sighed and sat heavily into his chair. "Harry, what am I going to do with you," he sighed, "more importantly, what is going on with you?"

Ron and Hermione sat worrying at their usual study table in the Gryffindor common room. Neither had any idea where Harry or Ginny had disappeared to. Ron had tried getting into Harry's room, with the reluctant help of Hermione, only to discover how much Harry really didn't want people in his room without permission. They argued for several minutes after finding the door locked until finally Ron's frustration overcame him. He pointed his wand at the door and shouted "ALAHOMORA" expecting the usual response.

Hermione however being more astute noticed that the door didn't make the tell tale 'click' it should have if the spell worked, but before she could state her observation, Ron had grabbed hold of the door and promptly collapsed to the ground unconscious.

"Ron! Are you okay!" she shouted kneeling next to her fallen boyfriend. She checked for a pulse and breathed a sigh of relief to find it strong and steady. "Only knocked out," she breathed. Grabbing her wand she pointed it at Ron saying "Enervate!"

Ron groaned and sat up groggily as if just waking up. "Mione what happened?" he asked rubbing the hand he had grabbed the door with.

"Well it looks like Harry has placed a few protection wards on his room. We should have checked for them before we tried anything."

"How'd he know how to do that? That's like Auror level stuff."

"Yeah I know, but if you haven't noticed Harry's changed quite a bit. It seems that his magic has changed too."

"Yeah right. How could he know anything like that! He was locked up in bloody Azkaban for a year!"

Hermione slapped Ron on the shoulder. "Language Ron! I don't know how he did it but he has. You heard about the tests he took so he

could resume his seventh year. He had to have passed them for Professor Dumbledore and the other professors to allow him to resume lessons with us.”

“Okay, but I still don’t understand how he did it.” Ron said muttering under his breath as he stood.

“I don’t either but we’ll find out when he gets back.” Hermione said resolutely with that determined look in her eye that always scared Ron.

“What are you on about ‘Mione?” He asked suspicious of what she was planning in that overly smart head of hers.

“Don’t worry about it Ron, I’ll tell you later. For now let’s just see if anyone has found them yet since we can’t get that stupid map from his room. I’m sure the other professors are looking for them if they haven’t already found them.”

Ron followed her obediently out of the head dormitory and back into the common room where they sat back down to study until Ginny and Harry showed back up.

Harry was reluctantly dragged from his pleasant dreams of Ginny by a constant poking in his shoulder. He swatted at the object of his annoyance without opening his eyes, not wanting to end the dream. The poking continued until he finally opened his eyes and saw a pair of large doleful eyes staring back at him scaring him to full consciousness. Trying to roll away from the creature he found he was trapped and then realized where he was when a groan of protest erupted beside him. Looking down he realized he was lying on the couch that was provided by the room of requirement with Ginny Weasley. She was lying comfortably on his chest with her arm draped across him fast asleep. His head shot back up to their intruder and a short blurry image seemed to be hopping up and down in front of him. He blinked several times to get the sleepiness from his eyes and he could sense that this creature meant him no harm but was agitated about something.

“Dobby!”

“Yes Harry Potter sir. It is Dobby sir.”

“What are you doing here Dobby? What time is it?”

“Dobby has come to warn Harry Potter sir and his Miss Weezy that the Hogwarts professors are very upset and are looking for you.”

“Why are they looking for us? Has something happened?” Harry asked starting to feel anxious himself.

Dobby bobbed up and down trying to decide what to say without angering the wizard he respected above all others. “Dobby has heard sir that you weren’t in classes and they are concerned for Harry Potter sir and his Miss Weezy.” Dobby bit his lip and started looking around the room panicking.

Harry groaned realizing what had happened. Rubbing his face he looked back at Dobby. He knew that look, if he didn’t say something fast Dobby would start hurting himself again.

“Dobby, thank you, you did the right thing. I don’t want you hurting yourself for this. Ah, Dobby what time is it?”

“It is being early sir, past 1 in the morning. Dobby is sorry, Harry Potter sir, that he disturbs great wizards sleep but Dobby must warn you before evil Mr. Snapes finds you.”

“Snapes out looking for me?”

“Yes sir, Mr. Harry Potter sir, he’s not knowing how to get into room of needs and is angry sir, very angry.”

“Thank you again Dobby and please just call me Harry, alright?”

“OH Mr Harry Potter sir is great wizard indeed allowing poor miserable Dobby to call him by given name. Dobby doesn’t deserve such an honor sir.”

"Please Dobby, you do deserve it, remember you saved my life? So anyway I suppose Dumbledore wants to see Ginny and me?"

"Yes sir, H-Harry sir. Master Dumbledore tells Dobby to tell you to meet him after breakfast in master Dumbledore's office he is."

"Dobby, could you do me a favor and come back and wake me up at 5 this morning?"

"Dobby be honored to do as Harry sir says, What about mean Mr. Snapes sir?"

"Thanks Dobby. Oh don't worry about him, I don't think he'll be bothering us anymore."

With that Dobby disappeared and Harry looked in wonder at the girl sleeping next to him on the couch. He could get used to this sort of thing. Yawning he stretched his head forward to kiss the top of Ginny's head and lay back down to get some more much needed rest.

Harry and Ginny made their way through the deserted corridors. As it was before breakfast, any students that were up were probably just getting out of bed.

Ginny was nervous when Harry told her that they had to see Dumbledore after they ate. She believed Dumbledore only called people to his office when they were in serious trouble. Well all except for Harry of course. He must have set a record for the number of visits to the headmaster's office while at Hogwarts. A slight smile lit her face as she thought of him and their night together in the room of requirements. Proud of the fact that he had opened up to her and told her things he never told anyone else, except for maybe Remus. He had spent a lot of time with Harry since he got out of Azkaban and the two looked very close. She was happy for their relationship. Harry needed someone like Remus in his life to help balance him out. Then again Harry could do with a lot more honest loving people in his life to help him through all this. No one could possibly understand what he was going through with the prophecy looming over his head. Although she knew there was still a lot he hadn't told her yet, she was willing to wait. Her behavior over the past year was despicable and she knew

she had a long way to go before his trust in her was restored. If it took forever she would do it. Hope filled her that there might be a chance for something more with Harry, but she had to concentrate on their friendship first.

“What are you smiling about?” Harry asked as they reached the Gargoyle protecting the entrance to the headmaster’s office. He had decided that he wasn’t going to wait until after breakfast to talk to the headmaster. To everyone else it would look like they were in trouble, and although they did skip lessons yesterday, he was not going to let the headmaster think he had the upper hand.

Harry had been watching Ginny as they walked through the corridors unnoticed by her. She must have been lost in her own thoughts and blindly following the familiar paths through the castle. He was captivated by the emotions that flashed through her beautiful eyes and the smile that lit her face. He was glad he was able to talk to Ginny so easily and felt better for doing so, but he was still leery of telling her everything and placing his complete trust in her. Maybe in time, but until then they would get to know each other all over again.

“Gin?”

Ginny snapped out of her thoughts and looked around shocked that they were standing in front of the gargoyle already.

“Oh, sorry Harry. Just thinking. Thanks Harry.”

“For what?”

“For talking to me. I hope things will go better from here.”

“Let’s just take it slow ok? There’s still a lot I’m dealing with and my trust in people isn’t so easily given anymore.” He knew it sounded harsh and somewhat rude but he didn’t want to fill her with any false ideas.

“I realize that Harry. I’m just glad we were able to talk. I’ll be here for you if you ever feel like talking again.”

Whatever Harry would have said was cut off as the gargoyle sprang aside revealing the stairs to Dumbledore's office.

"I guess he's waiting for us." Harry said nodding to the spiral stairs.

Ginny wrung her hands nervously wondering what was going to happen.

"It'll be okay Ginny don't worry."

"Are you sure? I mean we missed all those lessons yesterday and then dinner and....." Ginny said looking up at Harry, the fear evident in her eyes.

"Yep. I promise" he said offering her his arm with a sly smile spreading across his face and winking at her. She stifled a giggle and gracefully took his arm and they proceeded in silence up the stairs. Arriving at the top, Harry didn't bother to knock. Ginny looked at him with her head cocked in a questioning manner. In response he placed a finger to his lips and raised an eyebrow nodding at the door. As she was about to say something, Dumbledore's rich voice sounded from inside his office.

"Come in, Mr. Potter, Miss Weasley."

"See." Harry said stifling his laughter at the predictive nature of the old man.

Ginny just rolled her eyes and pushed the door open. As they entered they saw Dumbledore sitting at his desk with a knowing smile.

"Please take a seat. Lemon Drop?" he offered.

"No thanks" Harry said as he took a seat. He sensed the curiosity flowing from the occupants of the portraits that lined the walls of the office, but held back his comment.

Ginny just shook her head as she sat timidly in the chair next to Harry's.

"I suppose you are wondering why I have called you here?" Dumbledore asked as he watched the teens before him. He noticed the nervousness radiating from Miss Weasley and how she refused to look up at him. He was startled when he glanced at Harry. The young mans confidence and.....he couldn't tell what the other emotion was that was flickering in those emerald eyes that met his gaze dead on.

As soon as Dumbledore looked at Harry he nodded his head in the affirmative without removing his eye contact. He was amused at the surprise that registered in his former mentor's eyes. Normally he never showed his emotions except that annoying twinkle, but Harry had seen more in the last several months than he had ever seen since he came to Hogwarts.

"Well, yes then....on to business. It has been brought to my attention that the two of you missed your afternoon lessons yesterday. When you didn't show up for evening meal you had quite a few professors and friends worried as to your whereabouts. Would you care to explain your behavior?"

"Well you see professor...." Ginny started as she looked pleadingly at Harry.

"We are sorry that we missed the lessons headmaster but as for our whereabouts at dinner, I was not aware of the fact that it was a mandatory function. Not that it is any of my business sir, but were we the only ones that decided to skip this meal?"

"No Harry you are not the only ones that skipped dinner."

"I told you before that you were not going to run my life or manipulate me ever again. Since I have returned to Hogwarts that is all you seem to be doing. I warn you once again headmaster, you do not want to push me on this. As for the lessons that we missed I will be willing to serve whatever detention or punishment you deem appropriate with the crime. The reason we missed is because we got caught up in a discussion and lost track of time."



Both Ginny and Dumbledore stared open mouthed at Harry's statement. There was no mistaking the threat and the jab that Harry had so eloquently made.

"You wouldn't care to elaborate on what was so important that you lost track of time?"

"No sir."

"In that case Mr. Potter and Miss Weasley I have no choice but to issue you both detentions to be served with your head of house tonight at 8 p.m." Dumbledore watched the teens before him and was slightly annoyed at the response he received from Harry and the lack of information.

"There is always a choice sir." Harry stated blatantly throwing the words of the headmaster back at him.

"Yes professor" Ginny whispered dropping her head.

Harry was really getting hacked off at Dumbledore. Granted they missed classes so he would serve the detention without complaint, but he knew it was only because they didn't tell him anything about what they had been talking about.

"Miss Weasley, you are dismissed. In the future please try to keep better track of the time and your responsibilities. Mr. Potter if you would stay. I have a few other things that I would like to discuss with you."

Harry nodded and Ginny got up quietly from her chair. As she turned to leave Harry grabbed her hand and gave it a reassuring squeeze. She stopped and locked eyes with Harry, then smiled. Although Dumbledore had chastised them, she felt good and didn't really care about the detention. Sometimes there were more important things than school. As she smiled at him she squeezed his hand back then let go and left. Harry watched her until she left and the door closed behind her.

“What other “things” would you like to discuss professor?” Harry asked as he turned back around to face him.

“Harry we need to discuss your conduct the other day with professor Snape.”

“There is nothing more to say sir. I told you yesterday I will not be taking anymore classes with that poor excuse for a teacher. If the Pensieve memories were not enough proof of the circumstances than nothing is going to change your mind about him. I will go to the governors like I said and provide them the same proof. As it is I do have a class full of students who I dare say would be willing to testify to Snape’s misconduct over the years.”

Dumbledore noticed the determined look in Harry’s eyes and sighed deeply. “Harry you and Severus must get over this animosity you have for each other. You must let go of the anger you feel towards him and stop provoking him.”

Harry clenched his fists and counted to 10 to keep from blowing up. “Headmaster, I will not tolerate this anymore. You may have reason to trust the man, but I do not! Since the first minute I stepped into this school he has made it his mission to harass and belittle me at every opportunity—unprovoked I might add. He blatantly favors his own house docking points from the other houses whenever he feels he can get away with it, which is most of the time, since you do nothing to stop it and the students know this. His retribution is known throughout the school anytime a student complains about him. He is just as bad if not worse than Umbridge was in my fifth year. I have done everything I can to avoid the bastard but he seems to like seeking me out on purpose even to the point of taking points off me for breathing too loudly. I do not deserve this treatment, no one in this school deserves it and I will no longer stand for it. If what you saw in the Pensieve is not enough for you, I could fill it with Snapes biased and unwarranted attacks through the years, but I fear in your befuddled brain that won’t be enough. Snape should be removed from his position before he causes more damage.” Harry stated firmly in a deadly tone.

“Harry, that’s a bit unfair and rash don’t you think? I....”

"RASH! UNFAIR!" Harry yelled as he shot up out of his chair. "You're one to talk about rash and unfair!" he continued angrily, his low controlled voice spoke volumes of rage that Dumbledore had the audacity to accuse him of being rash and unfair. "Or do you need reminding of what exactly transpired over the last year. I am not the trusting, easily manipulated boy you threw unmercifully in to HELL headmaster. The sooner you understand that the better off you will be. I trust you keep that in mind."

To say Albus Dumbledore was terrified of the fire blazing in the young mans eyes, would be a drastic understatement. It took all his full 150 plus years of experience to tamp down the feelings rising within him. He had never lost such control of his emotions since before he had battled against Grindewald. Who did this boy think he was talking to? Closing his eyes against the struggle he forced himself to take several calming breaths. When he opened them again it was to see that Harry had walked over to a book case along the wall with his back towards him. Dumbledore wondered if Harry realized the effect he had on him.

"I'm sorry, 'sir' did the truth anger you?" Harry sneered.

Once again Dumbledore clamped down his emotions. "I am sorry Harry. I did not mean to imply...."

"DON'T" Harry said holding a hand to him. "I don't want to hear anymore of your lies. This subject is closed, I will not be taking any sort of lessons from that bumbling failure."

"If that is how you feel Harry, than I will have to respect your wishes. But as it is, you will need to take another class in order to fulfill the requirements of the school. Any ideas of what you would like to take? I of course will have to ask permission from the appropriate professor before we can finalize anything."

"You're doing it again professor. I truly wonder if you even know how to be truthful any longer after the lifetime worth of lies you have weaved. I will use that free time to train or conduct self study."

"If I may Harry, there is another option...." Dumbledore started, steeping his fingers together while resting his elbows on his desk.

"Oh really? Let me guess, you are willing to train me in certain....'aspects' ,shall we say?"

"Yes Harry that is what I am offering." He answered wondering how Harry had known that.

"As tempting as you may think the offer is, I have no more desire in spending any extra time with you than I do with Snape. So, No. I have already accepted an offer from Professor Lupin to train me in dueling. I believe since he is a proper professor teaching here at Hogwarts that should suffice to fulfill the requirements."

"Yes Harry, that will suffice. Please think on my offer. It still stands for any of your other free periods Harry, you need to be able to fight against Voldemort and I fear it will be sooner than expected."

"Ah so now using the prophecy against me? Well that won't work either Headmaster. I will not be your weapon. Oh don't get me wrong, I will fight Tom and I will win but not for you. You should really take a good look at yourself professor and figure out which side of this war you are really working for. I know you're against Tom and his death stinkers, but are you truly on the side of light or are you posturing for yourself? Good day Headmaster." Harry nodded his head and left. A thoroughly stunned and bewildered headmaster sat scrutinizing the discussion and where he had lost the battle.

Barely containing his fury at Dumbledore's incessant meddling, Harry stalked to the Great Hall for breakfast. Ignoring the curious stares from the student body as he entered, he headed straight to his usual seat. Ginny was waiting for him and gave him an understanding and reassuring smile.

"How'd it go Harry?"

"His usual meddling self!" Harry muttered taking his seat and piling food onto his plate.

"I'll talk to him if you want and explain it was my fault. I don't want to get you into trouble."

"That's not what he wanted to talk to me about. It isn't your fault. Besides if he never listens to me, I doubt he'd listen to you either. He's so caught up in himself that he can't see the mountain in front of his face. He's sees us all as pawns to do with whatever he pleases. Damn him, people have lives of their own to deal with, without him interfering and demanding they do what he says. He's no better than Voldemort!"

"Harry, that's a little harsh isn't it?"

"You don't know him like I do Gin."

"Okay, so what did he want then?"

"Stupid Snape again. I really don't understand why he's so caught up in forcing us to get along. There's no way in the nine hells that is going to ever happen! Dumbledore's just trying to force me into classes and situations I refuse to accept. For Merlin's sake; I'm already an adult! I don't need or want anyone making decisions for me!"

"I'm not sure I understand what you're getting at."

"I dropped potions and Dumbledore tried to tell me it was my fault, that I was the one provoking Snape. Then he threatens me that if I don't take another class I can't finish school. Not that I need it but...." he broke off looking around quickly to make sure no one heard his slip.

"He really threatened you?"

"Yeah, not surprising really. He's lost control of his weapon and his income. I told you before about his stealing from me. Well he's trying to maneuver his way back in to controlling me so he can get it back. That will not be happening. He's foolish enough to think I don't even know. He hasn't once brought it up but I know that it's the topmost priority for him right now."

“Well I can’t say I blame you for being so angry with him. What are you going to do about the lesson though?”

“I already set up extra dueling lessons with Remus so he had to accept that to fulfill the requirements. I can’t believe him! I aced those tests and he still thinks I don’t know enough to graduate.”

“Why don’t you just tell him about you’re training? I’m sure that he would understand and maybe even let you take your NEWTs early.”

“That’s not the point Gin. There’s other things going on that I haven’t told you about. You already know more than anyone besides Remus, but I don’t trust anyone else. I can’t afford to have anyone interfere and ruin the plans I have. There is so much more at stake than you realize.”

Ginny placed a hand on his shoulder in an attempt to try and comfort him. It was a small gesture but she hoped Harry knew he could trust her.

“I have no idea what you are talking about but I trust you. I won’t interfere or force you to tell me anything you don’t want to. But I doubt your plans are going to see fruition if you don’t get rid of some of this frustration your building up. You need some time to work this out.”

“I don’t have time Gin, that’s the problem. I know I need Dumbledore and the Orders help but I can’t wait around for them to realize I’m not a helpless boy anymore. I just don’t know how to work with them and I can’t sacrifice the plans I have in motion.”

“Don’t think about it Harry. You’ll do what’s right. You always have and you always will. I have faith in you.”

“Thanks Gin.” He said looking at his watch. Just then the morning post flew in and a regal looking brown owl dropped an official black letter in front of him. Curious about it he flipped it over to see who it was from. Excitement filled him as he read it was from the Goblin high council. Knowing that he was receiving more than his fair share

of staring from the head table he tucked it into his robes and stood up to leave. "I have to get outa here. Remus is waiting for me for my 'lessons' and I don't want to be late. I'll see you later?" he asked.

"Of course Harry. Have fun!" she said and watched him as he exited the Great Hall. Harry was definitely not the same boy she had grown to love during her years at Hogwarts. He was so much more now. He was strong young man fighting for what was right and growing more confident with each day. He might be hitting a lot of brick walls lately but she knew deep down that he would triumph in the end. Ginny only hoped she would be with him when he did.

Harry ran down to the Quidditch Pitch so he wouldn't be late. As it was Remus was no where to be found when he arrived. Stretching out his senses he found him walking to the pitch. Smiling slyly he cast a disillusionment spell on himself and conjured a blunted sword, also disillusioning it.

Remus started when he felt the rush of air coming towards him and barely missed the sword before it cleaved his head off his shoulders. Harry chuckled and removed the spells.

"You surrender Moony?" Harry asked with a sly grin.

"You should know by now cub a Marauder never surrenders!" came the reply and then the attack.

The sound of steel meeting steel clanged through the air in the early morning attracting the attention of the few individuals attending lessons outdoors. Remus and Harry fought on oblivious to the small crowd gathering at the entrance to the pitch. The two were so caught up in their sword play that only grunts for their physical exertion accompanied the noise of the fast pace duel. They communicated silently through body language and the taunting looks cast at each other.

To the first and second years that had gathered it seemed a page out of medieval history was being played before them. Their professors were obviously affected by the same shock they were under, for none of them moved but stood still transfixed by the sight. It seemed

almost impossible that their overly large Care of Magical Creatures Professor could be so surprised. No one noticed when Dumbledore arrived to watch, no one that is except for Harry.

As the duel wore on, Harry's senses started prickling, alerting him to the presence of others. He had fought to block out all his magic as he wanted to concentrate only on the physical aspect of his dueling with Remus. Although better than Remus it was still a challenge to keep the duel going and he was having fun. That was all lost when he sensed Dumbledore approach. All the exertion he had put into the duel had up until now helped wash away the stress of the morning, but now it started to come flooding back. He stopped abruptly and just managed to parry the blow Remus was making before he too stopped. Harry just nodded his head towards the spectators and walked away to get dressed. He wouldn't acknowledge anyone's presence and therefore hoped they would all just disperse.

Remus could feel the tension in the air and realized Harry wasn't particularly happy to have an audience, especially one that included the headmaster. Banishing his sword he cast several cleaning charms on himself and walked over to where Harry stood putting his shirt and robes back on.

"Sorry about that Harry. Guess our classroom is compromised."

"That's okay Remus, we can meet in the Room of Requirement for the lessons. No one will be able to interrupt us there. Would you like to head up and do some magical dueling? I still have an hour left."

"Sounds like a good idea, let me get rid of your fans and then we can go."

Harry snorted at the attempted joke but nodded and slowly continued to get dressed while Remus walked over and took care of the problem.

"Okay Harry let's go."

Harry cast a silencing spell around them and only laughed at Remus's questioning brow. "I got this letter from the Goblins right



before I came out here. It might be a good idea to read it without any extra eyes or ears around.”

“Right let’s keep walking, we’ll read it in the Room of Requirements.”

Once in the room Harry again cast several privacy and imperturbable charms to keep anyone from walking in on them, or from any of the nosey portraits from informing individuals that should not be informed.

Sitting on the comfortable couch that the room provided Harry took the letter out of his pocket and opened it.

Mr. Harry James Potter,

We of the Goblin Council request your presence to discuss further the conversation between yourself and Gabbin Horntooth. It has been brought to our attention that you represent that which we have not seen in too long a time. Please notify us as to when you will be able to attend.

Respectfully,

Dogrin Snacklecroft

Chief Mortif of the Goblin High Council

Harry handed the letter to Remus to read without a word. It wasn’t a long letter and left a lot to be explained. The fact that the High Council wanted to meet with him again was both unnerving and exciting.

“What do you think Moony?”

“Harry.....I....don’t know what to say. Never have I witnessed anything like this. The Goblin High Council rarely ever meets with even the Minister of Magic. Dealings between the ministry and goblins is usually taken care of by appointed clerks. This must be very important. I think it safe to say you have sparked their interest.”

"I have to agree with you. This just made my day! What do you say about making a trip this Saturday?"

"Harry you'd have to get permission from the headmaster and I...."

"Remus you forget so easily. I don't need permission from anyone. The headmaster thinks he can still monitor my magic but only because I allow it. He'll never know I'm gone and he can't dictate my life. This is too important to let slip and I know it won't be easy to finish, but the longer I wait the longer it will take and you know my time schedule."

"Okay Harry, but we need to be careful."

"Always Moony!"

"So, how about I take a response back to the goblins, that way we know it will get there without being intercepted."

"Brilliant. Just what I had in mind. Now on to other matters. I'm sure you know that Dumbledore spoke with me again this morning."

"Yes, and I heard it did not go too well."

"That depends on the perspective. I'd say it went great. Dumbledore still thinks I'm a dimwitted halfwit that needs his oh so great mentoring abilities. I of course fought him on it which is what he expects. You and I know that I don't really need anything from him except the intelligence he has on the ministry and Order activities. The tricky part is going to be in convincing him and the Wizengamot of my next move."

"The less I know the better." Remus mock moaned out making Harry laugh. "From what I heard you did a great job of upsetting Dumbledore. How are you going to spend time with him to get the information if you've ostracized him?"

"That's where you come in."

"What?"

"It's simple really. We've already established that you've been helping me work out issues over the summer and now you will be stepping up the pace in helping me re-enter society. You are going to speak with Dumbledore about me and how you think it's best I take lessons with him. We will have an argument and I will submit to your wishes out my great need to be accepted by you as my only friend in the world. Pitiful I know but they'll buy it hook line and sinker."

"Harry, don't you think there's the little flaw that Dumbledore is a pretty wily old coot and will catch on. He'll know something's up, you can't hide your power all the time."

"I'll give him a little but not enough to give it all away. I realize that. Ginny will also help in that matter."

"Do you think it wise using Ginny this way?"

"I'm not really using her, I'll let her know when I'm sure I can trust her fully. I know she wants to help, we discussed a few things yesterday."

"What of the others?"

"Just by be ignoring them they'll act just like I want them to. No change there. I don't want them harmed but I also don't want their friendship anymore."

"Harry I don't want you to get upset, but aren't you acting in the same manner you despise in the others? Manipulating people and using them towards your own ends?"

"I see your point, but the difference is that I'm the one that this is all about. Dumbledore and his Order keep moving around blindly without really doing anything and they're going to wind up killing more people than need be. Yes I'm manipulating people but I can make a difference, only I can bring an end to this war. There is also the difference that I actually care how it's effects the people I use."

"Just don't keep Ginny in the dark too long or it might backfire on you."

"I won't, but now I think we need to figure out what you're going to discuss with Dumbledore and how we're going to stage our argument."

"Why don't we meet here later tonight and discuss it then."

"Right, well I'm off to my pitiful life, see you later."

"Bye Harry."

## Chapter 14—New Alliances

By breakfast the next morning rumors were already traveling fast through the rank and file of Hogwarts about the dueling lessons of the previous day outshining the rumors about what had happened to Snape. Harry ignored them and sat down at his usual place with Ginny and Neville.

“What’s this I hear about dueling with swords yesterday?”

“Just another part of my training. I actually enjoy it, it allows me to let off pressure.”

“Isn’t it dangerous?” asked Neville worriedly.

“Well it can be Nev. But we blunt the swords so we can’t seriously injure each other.”

“Well else are you doing for training?” Ginny asked smirking while reaching for more scrambled eggs.

“A lot of things really. I start off with physical training before breakfast. You know running, pushups, hand to hand combat moves. Then I have magical dueling and regular lessons.”

“It shows too, I’m quite impressed with the results.” Ginny giggled. Harry just lowered his head hiding the smile on his face.

“So who teaches you potions now?”

“No one Nev. I’m not taking it anymore.”

“You’re lucky. I’m still stuck with him if I want to be a healer.” He said despondently.

“Luck had nothing to do with it. Snape crossed the line and I won’t stand for it anymore. I sent a formal letter to the Board of Governors this morning about him.” Harry said with malicious intent.

“Blimey Harry! You actually sent a complaint to the board?” Neville exclaimed spitting his mouthful of food all over the place. Ginny for her part nearly choked on the pumpkin juice she was drinking.”

Harry smirked at their reactions. “I warned Dumbledore I would if he didn’t do something. Well, he didn’t and so I did.”

“Harry aren’t you worried what he might do to you?” Neville asked gulping.

“Not really. Nobody can do any worse than what’s already been done to me.” He muttered to himself. The others caught it however and silence spread across the trio.

The tension was broken when Dumbledore rose from his seat to address the school. “Attention please! I have a few announcements. I would like to remind you all about the Yule Ball this year. It will be open to all 4th years and above. Those of you who are planning to attend please make sure that you place your names on the list which your heads of house will hold. To make this year more fun in this time of darkness, it has also been decided that we will have a Halloween Ball to be held on October 31st. This should give you all time to prepare as the first Hogsmeade weekend is scheduled for the first weekend in October. There will only be one other Hogsmeade weekend scheduled for the third weekend in October so I urge you all to make plans accordingly. That is all.”

Harry inwardly smirked at the lengths to which the headmaster was willing to manipulate everyone. Having an extra ‘Ball’ as a way to force them all to interact ‘nicely’ was just ludicrous, but the old devil obviously didn’t see the flaw in his plan. Harry was no longer a meek child blindly trusting of those in supposed authoritative roles. He wanted desperately to just say to hell with them all but knew it would screw his plans royally. So he would continue his act and work on in secret. He was startled out of his inner musings when he was softly punched in the arm.

“What?” he asked slightly surprised at the red head beside him.

"You didn't hear a word I said did you?" she responded shaking her head in mock despair.

"Sorry, what did you say?"

"I don't think I'm going to repeat it if you can't listen the first time around. Shows me how much you care." She sniffed and went back to eating.

"Fine, if you don't want to tell me I have to get going. Remus has already left and I'll be late for lessons." He said angrily. With that he got up and headed out of the Great Hall suppressing a smirk just as Ginny caught up to him and grabbed his arm.

"Harry, wait! I didn't mean it like that!" Looking up to him she couldn't read his expression and was unnerved at what she thought he was thinking with her last statement. "I'm really sorry Harry, I didn't think, please forgive me."

Harry chuckled softly at her desperate plea for forgiveness and the game was lost.

"Harry James Potter! I can't believe you. You did that on purpose! How could you be so mean? I was so worried...."

"Gin, calm down okay? Look I know you didn't mean anything, but if you're going to play around you better expect it back."

"OOHHHH!" Ginny almost howled out her frustration and stomped her foot.

Harry chuckled harder at her state which only caused her glare to narrow and she crossed her arms over her chest. "Do you want to hear what I said or not?"

"You're the one that didn't want to repeat yourself. It's up to you." Harry responded crossing his arms mimicking her.

"Fine! I wanted to know if you wanted to go to the Halloween Ball with me?" she huffed out.

“What?”

“You heard me. It would be just as friends. I really don’t want to have to deal with worrying about having a date and acting all proper like.”

“I don’t know Gin, I was kinda thinking about sitting this one out.” Glancing around the hall he made sure no one was listening in to their conversation.

“Okay, but do you mind if I sit out with you? I’m not trying to intrude on you or anything, it’s just I really don’t want to hang around my brother or Hermione and Neville is going with Luna, so it’s just...”

“Whoa, whoa Gin. Take a breath. Let me think about it will ya? If I don’t go then we can plan something else to do. I don’t mind spending time with you so you’re not intruding. Unlike other people.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well let’s just say there are some really nosey gits that I used to be close to that don’t understand the meaning of privacy.”

“You’re talking about Ron and Hermione aren’t you? What did they do this time?”

“Well they don’t know I know, but they’ve been trying to get in my rooms. The dumb gits. You would think they would’ve learned after their first attempt.”

“Ooh tell me!” she clapped excitedly upon hearing her brother had most likely been pranked.

Harry laughed at her animated gestures and couldn’t help but think how much fun they could have planning some pranks together. “Well let’s just say he received quite a ‘shock’ when he tried to enter my room the first time and the second and third, well Hermione set him right before anyone could see him. It’s getting right annoying having to share a common room with them.”



“But aren’t you supposed to have your own room?”

“Yeah, I do but since it’s in the head dorms, Hermione is right across the hall. She’s rarely alone if you know what I mean. How about we talk later, I really have to get to class.”

“Sure. Promise to tell me later?”

“Yeah I’ll meet you in the Room of Requirement later?”

“Bye Harry.”

The next two days passed slowly as Harry was anxious to hear back from both the Board of Governors and the Goblins. Although his lessons and planning with Remus were great, he knew what was to come and he dreaded it. His private talks with Ginny were easier now as he felt comfortable around her. She didn’t press for information like everyone else. Instead she kept trying to get him to join her planning pranks on the unwary victims of the student body. They joked and talked about inconsequential things. Suffice it to say they were both satisfied by the relationship they were building.

Remus and Harry had decided to continue their training at the Quidditch pitch. By Friday, his lessons had a regular crowd of spectators and even though he didn’t like the attention, Remus reminded him that it was a good way for him to practice focusing. Harry agreed and continued on. At the end of the lesson Remus leaned in close to Harry and cast a silencing spell around them so their conversation wouldn’t be heard.

“Harry, Dumbledore has received a letter from the board. I think you will be getting one shortly too.”

”Do you know what it said?” he asked while swiping a towel over his sweat dampened hair and neck.

“I don’t know what was actually written, but I could tell that he wasn’t very happy with it. From what I’ve learned from McGonagall, Snape’s been put on probation.”

Harry smiled genuinely at the news and looked at his friend. "That's good to hear! Wonder what old lard head said to that?"

It was Remus's turn to chuckle at that. "Well I haven't seen him around, but I would guess he's in a snit about it. We'll see him at lunch though. Should be a sight to see!"

"Oh I don't know. I would think he's going to hide that fact. Unfortunate really. Doesn't want his over-inflated pride hurt you know. Especially since I'm the one that caused it. I'm more interested in Dumblebums reaction."

"I'm not sure how he'll react, but I agree it should be pretty interesting as well. There's something else I needed to tell you though."

"Oh what's that?"

"Well you know what we discussed?" Harry nodded in the affirmative. "Well I wrote to the Governors as well to make sure that they accepted these lessons to fulfill the requirements for your education."

"You didn't?" Harry asked and turned on Remus appalled. "Remus this could ruin everything! Why didn't you talk to me first?"

"Calm down Harry. It actually worked out better than I thought. They agree that the extra lessons are necessary but do not agree to give you credit for them as a sanctioned curriculum. They hinted in their return letter to me that they sought council from trusted agents for this request. I believe they are referring to Dumbledore. Upon his advice it was deemed prudent for the headmaster to decide what lessons you would take to fulfill the requirements in addition to your 'extra' lessons. This could make it a lot easier on the two of us Harry."

Harry remained quiet contemplating the news. Thinking it through he had to agree that Remus was right in that it could definitely be used to their advantage. He certainly should have expected Dumbledore to make such a move. It would make it a lot easier for him to 'receive' lessons from the old man without having to give in. It would also make the staged fight between Remus and himself a lot more believable when he was finally notified. Remus wouldn't even have to

risk talking to Dumbledore about requesting lessons for Harry. "I agree Moony, but I think you're a coward! You just didn't want to face Dumbledore."

"Well you are partially right. Even though he can't get into my mind, he has an uncanny ability to sense lies and I didn't want to risk making him suspicious. That's not being a coward cub, that's just being smart!" he ended indignant at Harry's accusation.

"Whatever Moony. So when should I expect to be told?"

"I would say sometime today, so just be prepared."

"Alright."

After removing the silencing charm he quickly cleaned himself and headed off to his other lessons mentally preparing himself for the rest of the day and how he was going to act upon getting the news. It came a little quicker than he expected and with something else thrown in.

Sitting quietly at lunch he was only mildly surprised when two unknown owls arrived dropping their letters right in front of him. Out of the corner of his eye he noticed Ginny leaning over to see what they were, but didn't try to stop her. As he had expected one of the letters was from the Board of Directors and the other was unexpectedly from the Goblins. He quickly stuffed the Goblins letter into his robes to read later, not wanting to be distracted from his course of action.

"Is that a response from the governors about your complaint?" Ginny asked trying to hide her excitement.

"I expect so Gin."

"Well, let's see then. Open it! I want to hear how they're going to punish Snape!"

Upon hearing this, Neville leaned over the table to hear better. He too was extremely interested in what the governors would do upon a

student's complaint. Harry noticed this and looked up to Neville. "You want to read it?"

"N-n-n-nno. You go ahead Harry. It was your complaint."

Harry shook his head and began to open it. He didn't care about the actual contents as he already knew the gist of what they were going to say. Sure enough they had decreed that the headmaster would choose for Harry. He couldn't help the anger that welled within him even though he was expecting this. He let it swell, it would serve his purpose nicely. Slamming his hand on the table he was oblivious to the startled stares that shot his way as he stood and purposefully strode up to the head table to stop right in front of Remus.

"What is the meaning of this?" he ground out shoving the letter into his friends face.

Remus gulped visibly and looked around for help from his fellow teachers before turning back to Harry.

"Harry, I thought it best that you...."

"You thought it best!" Harry yelled out. "Who are you to decide what is best for me? You are not my guardian! How could you do this! I thought we were friends!"

"Harry I had to make sure the governors would accept the lessons. I didn't want you to...."

"Mr. Potter if you would please join me, I think it would be better suited to discuss this in my office." Dumbledore spoke up rising from his seat.

"I don't think so!" Harry snapped back. "This is just another one of your attempts to control me. I will not attend any lessons I have not chosen for myself."

"I'm afraid you have no choice Harry. The governors and I agree on this and it is binding. Now if you both will please follow me to my office." Invoking a tone that prevented argument.

Harry shot a glare at Remus who stood shakily and began to follow the headmaster out of the silent hall. When the pair reached the doors to the Great Hall, Dumbledore turned around. "Mr. Potter, come along."

Harry seethed, 'talk to me like a dog will you? Well at least he's acting how I expected.' Reigning in his anger he stalked towards the doors conscious of all the stares he was receiving. Chancing a glance at the Gryffindor table he saw both Hermione and Ron with fearful but smug expressions on their faces, which only served to raise his anger again. He could feel the mixture of emotions throughout the hall emanating from the other students, some smug, others surprised or shocked, there was also a small amount of fear. Satisfied that everyone believed what they were seeing he followed the two professors out of the hall and up to the headmaster's office.

That night Harry joined Remus in his private chambers and after placing several protection and privacy charms they both had a good long laugh.

"Oh Harry, the look on his face was priceless! Was he serious when he told me that was worse than after your fifth year?"

"Yeah, it was," Harry began giggling again. "I don't think he's going to be able to fix things this time though." He grinned with satisfaction.

"Wish I had a camera!"

"I have something better Moony, my Pensieve. Anytime you want to borrow it just ask. I think I might want to join you in looking back on this one day. I can't believe he bought it though."

"Well, I'd have to say he's a little blinded by who he thinks you are. He's caught up in the past like everyone else and can't see beyond the nose on his face to what is really going on." Remus said turning serious.

"I know, and that scares me. I have to wonder about what he's doing with Voldemort after realizing all that."

“Good point! Is he awake yet?”

“No, but he’s stirring. I don’t think I have that much time before he does finally wake up. Maybe a couple of weeks. By then though I hope to have a few more things in motion.”

“Have you heard from the Goblins yet?”

“Thanks for reminding me. I got this letter at lunch as well but didn’t read it.”

Harry pulled the letter out from his robes and opened it.

Dear Mr. Harry Potter,

The Goblin Council has agreed on the date you specified in your correspondence. We have provided a special portkey for your use. It will be undetected by certain parties that will remain anonymous. We look forward to meeting with you at the designated time. Please come alone as the portkey is only intended for your use. It will also return you upon completion of our discussion.

Respectfully,

Dogrin Snacklecroft

Chief Mortif of the Goblin High Council

“Well Moony, looks like our plans are in motion. Now we just have to figure out what I’m going to say to the Goblins and then how we’re going to convince the Ministry.” Harry said handing over the letter to Remus.

“I don’t think you have too much to worry about with the Goblins Harry. I’d say that it’s the Ministry that’s going to be hard to convince. Although with that ancient law you found it shouldn’t be too difficult to override them.”

"No, according to that law it's the Wizengamot that will have to support it. As Dumbledore is the Supreme Mugwump, that's going to be the sticking point."

"You'll work it out Harry. I think it's a brilliant plan."

"It's a brilliant plan as long as I'm not the one presenting it."

"Too true. Not many 17 year olds hold much sway with the older generations. Although you can be pretty persuasive no matter what you look like. Speaking of persuasive, how are you going to avoid your friends and Dumbledore?"

"That's the easy part. I've been studying in my rooms almost non-stop, which is annoying them all to no end. They'll just think I'm doing it again. Dumbledore won't even know I'm gone as his little tracking charms have been confused to pick up my aura within my rooms whether or not I'm there."

"How'd you do it?"

"My little secret Moony." Harry smiled mischievously.

"There are no such things as little secrets when it comes to you Harry. Is there anything you can't do?"

"Oh quite a bit actually," he said seriously. "It's just that what I can do far surpasses the knowledge of wizarding kind today. Most of what I can do has been forgotten and lost over time."

"You're still not going to tell me everything are you?" Remus whined like a little child.

Harry laughed at Remus's attempt at puppy dog eyes.

"You should feel satisfied that I even told you what I already have. You know most of the important stuff, everything else doesn't matter."

"Yeah but that's the fun stuff!"

“How old are you Moony?” Harry asked perturbed at the pitiful musings of Remus.

“Old enough, but you are only as old as you think you are. I like to think I’m pretty young and not too old to appreciate good pranking material when I see it. We could all use a few good laughs.”

“I happen to agree, but aren’t you the one who told me timing is everything?”

“You really know how to ruin the mood you know!”

“Stop sulking and let’s get to work. Tomorrows a big day! I was thinking you could meet me at ‘home’ and I could tell you about the meeting, that way we wouldn’t have to worry about charms and such.”

“Sounds like a plan to me. I’ll just head over to Diagon Alley for some supplies. No one should be suspicious of that. How will I know when you’re done?”

“I’ll signal you on the button.”

They continued to talk late into the night discussing possible options that the Goblins might want to discuss. Remus reminded Harry of how specific Goblin speech was and to be careful in what he was saying so as not to offend them. It wasn’t lost on Harry that his meeting was more likely to end up an interrogation of sorts than a two way discussion, but right now he didn’t care.

Yawning widely, Harry stood up to stretch and looked at the time. “Well I best be getting some sleep. I’ll see you tomorrow night Moony.”

“Goodnight Harry, you’ll do just fine tomorrow.”

“Thanks Moony.”



As Harry was opening the portrait hole to the Gryffindor common room he was not expecting anyone to be awake. So it was with a small amount of surprise when he bumped into someone.

"Where have you been?" an irate Ginny asked.

"Oh sorry Gin didn't see you there."

"Obviously!" was the curt response.

Harry just smiled at her antics knowing what this was about. Instead of prolonging it he decided in favor of getting it over with so he could get some sleep. "I'm sorry about not meeting up with you. Dumbledore's up to his old games again and I was delayed. I figured you had already gone to class and planned on talking to you later about it."

"How much later? You didn't even show up for dinner! And now I find you sneaking back into the common room at one in the morning. If I didn't know better I'd say you were avoiding me. Well?"

"I'm not avoiding you Gin. Why don't you come to my room and I'll explain?" he offered sighing.

That seemed to perk Ginny up. "You mean I get to see the oh so exalted and secret rooms of Harry Potter?" she squealed acting like a flirty fan girl.

"If you want to?" he chuckled.

"Let's go then."

Harry led her into the head dorm and performed a series of hand movements over his door disengaging the protections spells on his room. Pushing open the door he stood aside and bowed low sweeping his hand out in a motion indicating for her to enter. Ginny giggled at his display and started to walk into his room. She stopped still in the doorway at the sight.

"Harry, this is.....wow!"

"I know, I made a few alterations. Dumbledore had it set up strictly Gryffindorish but I find this to be much more comfortable."

"I like it. I never expected you to be this extravagant."

"I don't think it's extravagant. It's just what I like."

Harry had used a similar spell on his room as he had on his home at the Shrieking Shack to mask the interior. To the school and especially the headmaster nothing would seem out of place. However, Harry had decided that he needed more space so he had tripled the size of the room allowing for a study area, training area, sitting room and of course his bedroom and bath. What was so extravagant was the fact that Harry had designed it so that there were massive floor to ceiling windows covering an entire side of the room that magically looked out over the lake and forbidden forest. It was a beautiful view and could be seen from anywhere in the room. The windows of course had spells on them that would allow the occupant to dim the amount of light entering when needed. The floors, except the training area, were covered in a plush wine colored carpet that felt like walking on sponge. The walls were of wood paneling that added to the warm richness of the room. A huge fire place was off to one side near his bedroom, with a plush comfortable couch and two chairs that begged to be sit in.

Harry gave her the short tour showing her his bedroom and the bathroom which was the most spectacular. It had a forest theme to it. The shower/bath combo looked like a rock cliff that had a never ending water fall dropping into a cool wading pool. Mist swirled up around the bottom but was magically kept in that area. Plant life of various species clung to the rock wall and provided a canopy of sorts over the waterfall. A separate outcropping of rock led to a smaller bowl size pool off to the side that acted like a sink. Ginny was so curious that she spent more time in there figuring out the different functions of all the fixtures Harry had added. She was also anxious to ask if she could use it, but was too embarrassed.

"Just let me know when you want to use it Gin. It's not a problem." He said sensing her thoughts.

“Um, Harry, how do you. You know....where do you....”

Catching on to her train of thought he laughed and showed her the loo. After some time she finally came out and joined Harry in the sitting area.

“This place is great! Too bad I can’t have your room next year.”

“It won’t stay like this Gin. When I’m done here it will revert back to its original state.”

“Too bad! So what happened today? I hope you weren’t expecting me to forget my original question?”

“No I wasn’t. There is a lot more I haven’t told you but I think it’s time you know some of it.”

“Only if you want to tell me. You don’t have to.”

“No, I need to tell you some of it, but you have to promise not to get angry. I don’t want you thinking that I’m using you, even though I guess in a way I am.”

“What do you mean using me?” She asked her voice sounding harsher and eyes narrowing.

“Well, I told you about Dumbledore and that I have plans in motion. Part of that plan involves you and whether or not you decide to help me.”

“Help you how?”

“You know how I’ve been acting lately?”

“Yeah, you’re acting all moody, sullen, angry, rebellious, basically a huge git. It’s worse than your fifth year. Not that you don’t have reasons to act that way mind.”

Harry chuckled softly. "That's good you think that. You see if you believe me to act that way, than everybody else will too. I need for everyone to think that way. I also need everyone to think I don't know that much about magic or how to use it."

"Harry that's going to be hard especially after the exams you took. They know something happened while you were in Azkaban."

"Yes, they suspect something but they don't know anything. Nothing I've shown them is anything that I couldn't have learned with intense studying since I escaped."

"But Harry I've seen what you can do, it's pretty obvious tha...."

Harry held up his hand to quiet her. "You've seen what James Roper can do, not what Harry Potter can do. The only thing they know is that somehow I escaped Azkaban, stupidly showed up in Diagon Alley to get caught then escaped again only to show up later to take some pretty tough exams. No one but you and Remus knows the connection between James and me and it needs to stay that way."

"Okay, I have to give you that, but why Harry? Why does it all need to remain secret? The entire order knows about you and Voldemort and showing them what you can do will get them off your back."

"No it won't Gin. I can't have this knowledge escaping and getting into the wrong hands. I mentioned before plans I have set in motion. Well one of them involves the Goblins. I'm going to see them to discuss a few things tomorrow, which I hope will make things move a little quicker. The problem lies in that Voldemort will come after me, he will also come after Hogwarts. He views it as the last bastion for the light and would see it fall so that the rest of the wizarding world gives in easily. I can't let that happen. If I'm here, I can protect Hogwarts. It's complicated, but there are other things involved. I can't fight Voldemort if I'm constantly trying to take out his supporters. I need to remove them from the equation, but I can't do it without help. I'm hoping tomorrow will provide that help."

“So you’re trying to make an alliance with the Goblins? Do you think they’re trustworthy with all the history of rebellions?” she asked skeptically.

“Well that’s part of what I discovered over the summer and am looking in to. I can’t explain it all right now. Please tell me you’ll keep this all secret Gin?”

“I will Harry, but how am I supposed to pretend that you’re not as depressed and angry as everyone thinks?”

“Well...you see...that’s up to you.”

“Spill Harry Potter!”

“Outside of this room and certain other special places I have to act the same old way. Inside of this room I can do whatever I want. If someone special; that is to say, someone desperately trying to help poor despondent Harry Potter in what ever way she can, wants to have access to my rooms, I can give that person special permission to stay here to help me over my depression.” He said smiling at her.

“That would never work Harry. You know my parents and brothers. Heck even Hermione would shout foul. They would never in a million years allow me to stay un-chaperoned in the same room as a teen age boy.”

“Ah but you are forgetting that this teen age boy is very special. He has been deeply wronged and has withdrawn from everything and everyone he knows. He has even just recently cut himself off from the very person who was helping him over the summer. Remus betrayed him and he has no one left to trust. Dumbledore and the others would do anything to get their golden boy back under their control.”

“I don’t believe you.”

“I’ll make you a bet. If you’re not situated in my rooms by next weekend I’ll do whatever you want for the rest of the year no questions asked.”

“Whatever I want, whenever I want, no questions asked?”

“Yes.”

“And what exactly do you get out of this?”

“I get to spend time with you as I really am. No more pretend, we can actually get to know each other better instead of what I have to act like to everyone else. Plus I get another scheming brain to bounce ideas off of.”

“Sounds like a win-win situation for me Harry. Not only do I get to spend time with you, but I also get to learn your secrets. Even if I don’t stay in your rooms I still get to know your secrets, so you’re on. How are you going to orchestrate this little plot, if you don’t mind my asking?”

“Well that’s where Remus will help out, but we’ll need to put on some good acting of our own. We’ll have to meet and talk about it later though because I really need to get some sleep for tomorrow.”

“How are you getting out of the castle without Dumbledore knowing you’re gone?”

“That’s the easy part. He really puts too much faith in his own abilities. Don’t worry about it though. I’m going to be pretending I’ve shut myself in my room over the weekend. You just need to play along with that. Can you do that?”

“Only if you tell me all about what happens when you get back.”

“I will. Now if you don’t mind....”

“How rude,” Ginny laughed as Harry levitated her over to the door. Harry quickly walked over to the door and was about to open it when Ginny caught his hand.

“Do I get a good night kiss?”

“Do you want one?”

“Oh, you are so.....” but before Ginny could utter another word Harry had encircled her within his arms and pressed his lips over hers. Tightening his grip he forced Ginny closer to him so he could feel her soft curves pressed against his torso. She opened to him and he felt the soft moan as she swept her arms up around his neck. Deepening the kiss she ran her fingers into his hair and pressed against him harder wanting more. Harry almost lost control; it felt so good to have her in his arms. To be able to give in to the feelings engulfing him without having to worry about anyone seeing them and giving up the game was so uplifting. Upon that thought he returned to the present and gently pulled away from her. Ginny protested at his absence.

“Gin, you need to go to bed and so do I. Just think in a week we’ll both be in here and can do whatever we please.”

“Don’t get to cocky Potter! I’m not that easy. Just because I let you kiss me this once doesn’t mean I’ll do it again.”

“You think so huh?”

“I don’t think I know.”

“We’ll see about that Gin. Goodnight.”

“Night Harry.” She said walking out the door trying to suppress the lightheadedness she felt from the kiss. She prayed Harry would find a way to carry out this plan successfully.

The next day dawned bright and sunny as Harry woke early. Instead of going outside to complete his workout he stayed in his room and used his training area to further the perception that he was staying in his rooms. At the appointed time he grabbed the portkey and disappeared from Hogwarts without a soul knowing.

He arrived exactly on time in the chambers of the Goblin Council. Looking around he was still awestruck by the room. This time however, the room wasn’t empty as all the seats around the semi-circular table were filled by Goblins of various ages and states of dress. Although they did not wear robes like wizards and witches,

their attire was none-the-less spectacular. Most had on suits made of extravagant material lined in gold or silver and adorned with precious metals. It was a magnificent sight to behold as they glittered and sparkled in the wavering light of the room. At a soft cough from his right he looked down to see Griphook who motioned him forward. He took several steps and bowed to the center of the table where he suspected the head Goblin sat.

"I am honored that you have accepted my petition for audience with the Goblin High Council." He said reverently.

The head goblin nodded. "Please take a seat Mr. Potter and we will proceed."

Harry did as the goblin requested and returned his attention back to the front of the room.

"As you know Mr. Potter, we have reviewed your conversation and have found it quite intriguing that you have a special interest in our history. From past experience it is uncommon that anyone outside of the Goblin Race show such interest. There has only been one other time in history that this has been the case and I am sure that you understand that to which I refer."

"Yes, sir. I found a book of Goblin History within my family vault which explained the past in a way that was never done before. With your permission sir I would like to be direct, but I am afraid that in doing so I risk the chance of offending those present."

"Please Mr. Potter, you do not risk such here. We know you are interested in the history of Azkaban. It is also clear to us that somehow you have recognized the Goblin runes that are here at Gringotts. I am puzzled as to just how you recognized them but have a small understanding from what Griphook has told me. What is it that you wish to gain Mr. Potter?"

"I wish to form an alliance with the Goblins against Voldemort sir."

"Ah I see." The Goblin spoke quietly. "In that case Mr. Potter what do you propose?"



Harry explained exactly what he wanted and how he wanted to go about doing it. The goblins debated for over four hours continually asking questions to clarify certain issues. The meeting wasn't quite the interrogation he had been expecting but it was close. In the end however they agreed with the plan and had the treaty drawn up between themselves and Harry with room for the Wizengamot to sign if they agreed. Now it would be up to Harry to get the Wizengamot to see his way of things which he hoped would not take too long.

## Chapter 15 Harry's Depression

After taking the portkey from the Goblins back to his room, Harry changed clothes, activated the phoenix button, and left once again. Arriving at the Shrieking Shack, he found Remus had made a fine dinner to celebrate the alliance with the Goblins even though he didn't know the actual details. Through the night Harry explained what happened and they plotted and planned their strategy to deal with the members of the Wizengamot. Remus had expertly completed his research in gaining much needed information about each member which went a long way in finalizing how they could get each member to agree to their plan. They would only have to resort to outright blackmail or bribery in two instances. Dumbledore would be the wild card and they were pretty certain that once the rest were in line he wouldn't have much choice but to go along with the rest. Upon completing 11 letters, Remus set them aside to send out through the public post in Hogsmeade tomorrow.

Harry also explained to Remus about Ginny and his plans to involve her and train her so she could not only help, but also protect herself from the undeniable attention she would be receiving shortly. Even though he had told Ginny about a lot of what was going on there was still more to reveal and he didn't want to do it too fast. There was the very real threat that Dumbledore and the Order members would learn too much from her if they could enter her mind and find out what they were planning. As of now they were unsuspecting of her role in all this, she was innocent little Ginny pining away over her crush of the Boy-Who-Lived and only wanted to help. They still saw her as an 8 year child that didn't have clue one about the real world. Oh how wrong they were! Ginny was more than eager to start dishing out a little payback but had agreed with Harry that it was still dangerous until she could protect the information.

Remus had some good ideas to add in this matter that Harry hadn't thought of. Oh he had the power to do a lot of things, but he had learned not to run into anything without thought. He wanted things to happen in a certain order and that took careful planning. He was playing Dumbledore's own game of manipulation but only using it against those people that had truly betrayed him and didn't blatantly force them into making their choices. Sure he worked their emotions

but he always had backup plans if they chose differently than he expected. If he could hold off Voldemort and his forces from attacking too soon he could establish much, much more!

After a long discussion they decided that they would wait to tell Ginny anything further until she was under the protection of Harry. Ginny would be angry but she would understand and play along so she wouldn't cause everything to come tumbling down around them.

Sleeping late the next day, it was after lunch by the time they got themselves together. Realizing that the day was passing quickly, Remus headed out to post the letters to the Wizengamot while Harry went back to his room to start his search for Ginny. Taking a deep breath and preparing for the worst he schooled his features and exited his room and the head dorm to find an empty common room. It was a slight shock but then considering it was a weekend, he realized most students would be outside enjoying the day. He wandered around the corridors of the castle looking quite grumpy and unapproachable for about an hour. Silently he was laughing at the looks of the students he ran across. Some were terrified, others confused or unsure how to treat him. All of them avoided him and quickly continued on their way past. Tired of stalking the corridors, he made his way out to the grounds. Keeping his head down and his hands shoved into his pockets he strode sullenly to the lake to see if Ginny was out there. Stretching his senses he could tell she wasn't too far away but unfortunately, for them at least, were also his two wayward former friends. Apparently Ron, Hermione and Ginny had decided to spend the day together. This would work towards his advantage even if he didn't want to see the two of them. Making sure his mask was in place he continued to walk forward until he was sure that they had seen him. Acting as if he was just glancing around at his surroundings, he made a startled show upon seeing them and turned to walk away.

"Harry!" a voice called to him and then hurried footsteps were trying to catch up to him. Closing his eyes he took a deep calming breath and stopped. A gentle hand was laid on his shoulder and he jerked away violently, turning to face who it was, even though he already knew. As he had sensed, it was Ginny and standing behind her was Hermione and Ron looking unnerved but determined.

“Harry?” she asked wringing her hands together and looking worried. Harry just shook his head still staring emotionlessly at his two former friends. He was about to turn and walk away again when Hermione spoke up.

“Harry, where have you been all weekend?” We’ve been worried about you!” Hermione said quickly.

Harry snorted in disbelief, which didn’t go unnoticed by the others. For all Hermione knew he was locked up in his room all weekend and was just trying to be her usual nosy self.

“It’s not good to lock yourself away from everybody Harry? Why won’t you let us in your room? If you’d just tell us what’s going on we could help.” Ron spoke up in a rare show of courage. As usual though, the foolishness of his words echoed his lack of intelligence.

“It’s no different than what I’ve been used to. I do not want nor do I need help from people like you.” Harry answered scathingly. “As for my room, I requested privacy for a reason and Dumbledore saw fit to grant my request.”

“Harry you can’t do this to us. You have to talk to someone, who better than your friends? I know you still have nightmares, we could help you if we knew how to get in your room.” Hermione pressed.

“I don’t have to talk to anyone Granger. As for friends, I don’t have any. My personal life is none of your concern as you have proven abundantly.”

“We’re prefects Harry; you have to give us the password in case of emergencies.” She said stomping her foot in aggravation.

Harry laughed outright at her. “You don’t make the rules Granger. I have permission from the headmaster for my arrangements and nothing you do or say will change that. Get it through that overstuffed brain of yours!”

"Hang on there Harry, no need to get angry. We're all living in the head dorms, so we should all have the passwords in case any of us needs help." Ron said turning red.

"Right.....So you can break into my room and steal my things again? Maybe you'd like to destroy some of my new possessions? I know you've been trying to get in, unsuccessfully I might add. Tell me...what's so important that you just have to get into my room?" Harry paused watching their eyes drop under his scrutiny and their faces flushing even more. They were hiding something and with a little help of his legilimency he found they were reporting his every action to Dumbledore. Not surprised by this in the slightest he was actually feeling quite gleeful that they were falling so nicely into his hands. Of course none of this showed on his face. "I see....You want me to trust you blindly and tell you everything, but when I ask a simple question you refuse. A lot of good that does in making me want to open up to you if you're not going to return the favor. The concept of trust is that it has to work both ways!" he stated hotly.

"Wait a minute," Ginny interrupted, "What do you mean 'We're all living in the head dorms,' Ron? Since when do you live in there and not the seventh year dorms?"

Harry could have kissed the redheaded vixen right then and there if it weren't for their deception. Schooling his features he shot his head up to glare at his two former friends maliciously and waited for their answer. The shame and embarrassment that shown through the bowed heads, shrugged shoulders and reddening faces told him all he needed to know for now.

"What's this? Little miss conformist, breaking the rules and letting her boyfriend stay in her rooms. Please tell me it's not true!" he said sarcastically. "You don't break rules, or maybe you only obey them when they serve your own purposes. How perfectly Slytherin of you!" he sneered.

"How dare you!" she shot at him.

"Take that back..." Ron shouted but Ginny once again interrupted them.

"I wonder what Professor McGonagall will say about all this? The Head girl abusing her privileges, what a story." She laughed and then pulled at Harry's arm to get him to leave. "Come on Harry, let's go."

Harry looked at the hand on his arm then up into Ginny's smirking face before nodding curtly and following her lead. They left the two enraged teens behind as they made their way silently back to the castle and into Harry's room.

As soon as the door closed and was warded, Harry let out the laughter he had been forcefully holding in. "Merlin Gin! Can you believe it? I knew they were having late night sessions but actually sharing a room. Ugh! That's just something I'd rather not have a mental image of." He shivered at the thought.

"I know! I can't see my brother....Never mind, too much information. Still it's a nice juicy bit of material to use against them at a later time. They'll never admit it to anyone though. Wouldn't it be lovely if we could set them up for the fall they deserve?"

"Oh, believe me it's coming, it may be sooner than you think." He sniggered.

"Oh do tell!" she said excitedly clapping her hands together.

"Later. We have to talk about our current mission."

"You really know how to spoil a good thing, you know that?"

"All good things come to those who wait. Patience Gin, it'll be better this way, trust me."

"I was never really good at the patience thing, but I'm learning. So what are we doing?"

"Well first off, I talked to Remus last night about you. Nothing bad," he said quickly upon seeing her look of indignation, "As this all plays out, Dumbledore is more than likely to start trying to read your thoughts and memories to find out what's going on with me."

“He’d really do that? Invade someone’s privacy without asking?”

Harry raised his eyebrows incredulously at the surprise in her voice. “Come on Gin! Look at how he’s treated me! Do you think he’d even bat an eye using anyone else?”

“Point taken. So how do I stop it? What can we do?”

“Well you won’t be able to stop him until I can teach you occlumency. We’ll start you off with a few exercises a little later tonight. For now though we can’t let Dumbledore suspect that there is anything different about you. What I’m about to suggest is a little unorthodox and it’s up to you to make the final decision.” He looked at her questioningly.

“Go on I’m listening.”

“Well, I want to place sort of an alarm in your mind that would alert me to when Dumbledore was trying to read your mind. I would then be able to enter your mind to block certain memories that we don’t want him to know about.”

“How does that work? Wouldn’t he notice you in my mind?”

“No he wouldn’t. I can mask my magical aura to match yours. I can sort of collect the memories we don’t want him to see and keep them away from him by directing other memories to hold his attention.”

“Why can’t you just memory charm me or set up some sort of block on those memories? It’s seems a little chancy.”

“I could, but it would take up too much energy to maintain it. I would not only be sustaining my own mental shields but yours as well on a continual basis. When you’re near me it’s not as draining as when you’re further away. Believe me, it takes a lot of energy to force your way into someone else’s mind and then maintain it.”

“Is that what you did to Voldemort? Force your way into his mind?”

“It was similar, it took a lot of power to break through his shields, he already is an accomplished occlumens and I’m sure he’ll work on strengthening his mental shields when he wakes up. Sure it causes him immense pain each time I blast him, and I managed to knock him into unconsciousness for several months this time, but it gets harder each time I do it. Distance and his strength and knowledge of that kind of attack prepares him better for it in the future. If you’re expecting something in a certain way you’re better able to protect against it.”

“I think I understand. Like if you’re expecting someone to shoot a stunner at you, you know you can block it with a shield charm.”

“Yeah that’s pretty much it. Not only will this way take less energy, but it will keep Dumbledore from getting suspicious. He would be able to detect a memory charm or a block in your mind. He has the power to break through those even if it would be taxing on him and very dangerous for you. I wouldn’t put it past him to sacrifice your sanity in order to gain any information you might hold.”

“So, you’ll teach me to block the old man out?” she said grinning wickedly. “I might not be able to stop him now, but I can’t wait to see the look on his face when I can force him out of my mind and show him not to mess around with me.”

“I like the way you think, Miss Weasley! We’ll start soon, there are other things that I’ll teach you as well but we need to discuss what’s going to happen this week.”

“Oh yeah! So what’s the plan, how are we going to get not only Dumbledore and McGonagall to agree but my family?”

“We’ll put the idea into theirs heads without them even knowing it. I expect Dumbledore will at some point ask to see you and then question you about the nature of our friendship. I’m positive that he’ll start using occlumency on you so I’ll be there with you in a sense. You know what he’s looking for, so just go with describing your memories of those events. You can elaborate if you want, he won’t really know the difference as the memories only give him an idea of what’s going on.”



“So you want me to give partial truths. Stay as close to the truth as I can without straying to far out of bounds.” At Harry’s nod, she continued, “no problem, I do that all the time at home.”

“Okay then I think we should start getting the ward in place. You’ll feel a little tingle and that’s all. You’ll also feel a little tingle when someone is trying to enter your mind and then a little disorientation when I enter. You ready?”

“As I’ll ever be, let’s go.” She said.

Harry proceeded to instruct her in what he needed her to do before he placed the ward. After an hour of intense concentration he opened his eyes and instructed Ginny to do the same.

“Wow, now that was weird. I could actually feel you moving around in my mind. That’s just creepy.” She shivered. “Is that how it feels every time someone uses legilimency against you?”

“Not really, it’s similar, but I wasn’t really trying to hide myself from you.” She laughed at the mental picture it gave her.

“So now what? Are you going to teach me how to start occlumency?”

“Well not quite. I’ve learned a few things that will make it easier for you to learn. First thing I need to teach you, is how to meditate and focus your mind.”

They sat for the next couple hours going through several different exercises for Ginny to run through every morning and night at the least. He explained that the more she practiced the easier it would become for each step after. Soon it was time for dinner but Harry didn’t want to go down to the Great Hall. Urging Ginny to go to keep up appearances she reluctantly left his room.

“What were you doing in there?” the voice of her brother demanded from behind her.

She turned and scowled at him before continuing on her way. A hand roughly grabbed her arm and yanked her to a stop. "Answer me Ginny! What were you doing in there?"

"None of your business, Ronald."

"Ginny please, just tell us what's going on." Hermione pleaded coming up behind her brother.

"I was talking to Harry," Ginny answered quietly not really wanting to get into this right now, but knowing the part she had to play.

"Tell us what you were talking about?" Ron again crassly insisted.

"If Harry wanted you to know he would tell you. I'm not about to betray him, he's had enough of that lately." She said pointedly. Both Ron and Hermione blinked at the accusation and backed off looking warily at the door to Harry's room.

"Let's just go down to dinner Ron, we'll try and talk to him later." Hermione suggested.

"Fine!" Ron snapped and stormed out the door. Without missing a step, Ginny followed but found her own friends to accompany her to dinner. It didn't seem as if she had been too far behind Ron and Hermione in making her way down but as she entered the Great Hall she saw the two of them up at the head table in quiet discussion with Professor McGonagall and Dumbledore. Ginny smiled to herself knowing exactly what the two were up to and filed it away to tell Harry about later.

The next morning Harry woke early and began his workout before breakfast. He pushed himself harder feeling pent up nervous tension. He needed some action but there wasn't any for the time being and he reminded himself that he had to maintain his mental wits about him and not go running off full tilt into battle mode. Oh how he longed for a good fight though! Maybe his sparring session with Remus would help to run some of this off. But before he would be able to do that he had another mental battle to wage coming up at breakfast.

Sitting alone at his usual place at the Gryffindor table, he waited patiently for Ginny. To others he looked the typical brooding and moody Harry Potter. As expected Hermione and Ron entered first and bee lined their way to where he was sitting. Preparing himself he waited for the first strike to fall.

“Harry we talked to Professor McGonagall and she agrees with us that you need to give us the password to your room.” Hermione stated arms folded across her chest. Ron stood beside her quietly and smirked superiorly down at him.

Without moving from his spot or turning to look at them Harry answered with a hard resounding, “NO”

“Harry you can’t go against our head of house. We’ll get her to make you tell us.”

“This has nothing to do with McGonagall. Headmaster Dumbledore gave me permission and only he can take it away. Tell me, what did he have to say when you went complaining to him?”

“How did you...OW!” Ron started before being elbowed in the ribs by Hermione.

“He said he would leave it up to you and Professor McGonagall to decide.” Hermione finished huffily.

“So you just decided to try to force me to your bidding without letting Professor McGonagall talk to me about it first?” he queried in a dangerously soft voice.

“I’m head girl, she trusts me to make decisions about these types of things.”

“I’m sure she does, but as this does not pertain to you in the slightest I suggest you take your pompous, self-righteous, know-it-all fucking self and get the hell away from me!” he ended shouting as he stood up to glare right into her face. He could see the sparkle in her eyes as the tears started to develop.

Catching movement out of the corner of his eye he ducked the blow that Ron had swung at him. Without blinking an eye he kicked out and swiped Ron's legs right out from underneath him causing him to fall hard and fast onto his back. This action successfully knocked the wind out of him preventing him from getting up. Hermione moved to strike him and he grabbed her wrist forcefully and growled into her face.

"You will never get another chance to hit me again. Your last free hit was taken before I left for Azkaban, you filthy waste of a witch!" To say that Hermione was shocked was an understatement, she gasped loudly and started to tremble and break away from Harry but he held her firm. He was about to start in on her again when he felt a small hand on his arm that spread warmth throughout his body. Looking to the side he saw Ginny standing there with Professor McGonagall behind her who had obviously heard what he had said to Hermione. He could feel the astonished stares of the other students weigh down upon him and the whispers echo through his mind in a blur. Ginny placed a hand on his cheek and he looked into her eyes, those warm loving, caring eyes that he could melt into. He gathered himself and literally threw Hermione away. She tripped and fell landing neatly besides a now sitting but still flustered Ron. Taking Ginny's hand Harry started to leave the Great Hall, but the voice of Professor McGonagall called him back. She handed him his new schedule, knowing what to expect he opened it and let a scowl rip across his face. He glared at his head of house then shifted his attention to the head table and sought out Remus.

Remus seeing the look on Harry's face tried to shrink below the table but failed miserably. He shot his eyes to Dumbledore than back to Harry and cringed further. Harry saw the look on Remus' face and wished he could laugh outright but knew it would ruin everything, instead he moved to glare right into the eyes of the headmaster. Almost immediately he felt a tingling sensation in his mind but brushed it off and sent it elsewhere.

Albus Dumbledore was truly disconcerted by the look in Harry's eyes after the boy received his new schedule. Maybe it was not the right time to give it to him being so closely timed after his run in with Mr. Weasley and Miss Granger. No, it had to be given to him, after all his

new classes were to start today. The look he sent Remus was unnerving, but he couldn't help but notice the calming effect young Miss Weasley had on Harry. Maybe she could break through to him and prevent him from sliding down the dark path he feared Harry was going. He would try to talk to the boy during his special lesson this morning. As he watched he saw the hard emerald eyes focus on him and sent out a tentative search of the boys mind, but this unnerved him even more.

Feet and the bottom of black robes encompassed his vision. His field of view expanded as it looked up and he saw Hogwarts students ambling through the corridors. A rat scurried into view and the vision snapped quickly to follow it. A chase ensued down many corridors and steps getting darker and darker seeming to lead into the dungeons. The rat slowed as did his vision. It was almost as if he was stalking the rat, then the world spun and he could see he was on top of the rat and claws were attacking the small creature. The vision ended.

Thoroughly confused the headmaster mentally shook his mind to clear the images wondering where they had come from and what this possibly could mean. As he focused again on the present he saw Miss Weasley coaxing Harry out of the Great Hall. Maybe Miss Weasley would be the one to bring Harry back to them; she seemed to be the only one that Harry listened to lately.

Once far enough away from the castle Ginny let go of the laughter she had been containing.

"Waste of a witch! HA! That was good Harry; you know she won't get over that easily. Did you see the look on Ron's face? It was priceless!"

Harry broke down and joined her, "Yeah, those two just don't get it. Were they like this all last year?" Ginny nodded and Harry snorted in disgust. "Merlin knows someone should've put them in their place a long time ago. Although I have to admit, I'm quite liking the opportunity."

They talked and laughed for a while longer until Harry felt Remus approaching them. Informing Ginny they got up and met him. Ginny said goodbye as she headed for her first lesson while Harry and Remus went up to the Room of Requirements for Dueling. Remus enlisted the aid of several conjured dummies to assist in the lesson because Harry was well beyond dueling only against Remus. By the end of the lesson they were both drenched in sweat and sported several new bruises and cuts which Harry easily healed for both of them.

"So what are you going to do during your lesson with Dumbledore?" Remus queried.

"Well I'm not planning on anything. I'm sort of waiting for him to make the first move."

"Feeling him out eh?"

"Something like that, you know this morning he tried to use Legilimency on me?"

"Really? Did you block it? Does he know?"

"Honestly Remus, you worry too much. Of course I didn't block it, that would give the codger too much information."

"So if you didn't block it what does he know? What juicy bit of information did you allow him?"

"I didn't!"

"What?" Remus asked thoroughly confused. "If you didn't block it and didn't let him into your mind.....I don't get it. I don't claim to be an expert on Occlumency or any of the mind magic's but logic tells me something was revealed."

"Yeah something was but not in the sense that you're talking about. I merely redirected his focus."

"Redirected? How's that possible and ....."

"He merely saw what was going on in the mind of Filch's cat Mrs. Norris." Harry shrugged, biting his lower lip to keep from laughing at Remus perplexed expression.

"Filch's cat? What.....Oh, that's good Harry!" Remus laughed and Harry joined. "Definitely Marauder materiel that! Do you think he caught on?"

"No, definitely not if the confused expression he wore was any indication. He's probably guessing that somehow it's a memory of something I saw but can't fathom it's importance or why I would be thinking about it."

"So anyway," Remus breathed heavily getting his laughter under control. "What about the lesson?"

"Like I said I'll wait and see what he's up to. I don't doubt that he'll try to enter my mind again, but I've got several targets in mind for him to view if he tries it. But I better be getting to Care of Magical Creatures, don't want to give anyone the opportunity to give me detention you know."

"Like they really need it, they seem to find plenty of false reasons." Remus said in loathing, Harry grunted his agreement as he magically cleansed himself. "Same time tonight Harry?"

Harry nodded and waved goodbye as he walked out the door.

It was finally time to face Dumbledore and Harry was a little nervous. He wasn't afraid of anything Dumbledore might try, but he wasn't ready to reveal too much about what he could do. Dumbledore and practically everyone else still believed him incapable although the proof was right before their eyes. Still, they seemed to miss the biggest clues, but that worked well with Harry's plan. Guess the old saying of hiding things in plain sight really had its lessons. Walking up to the gargoyle he presented the password and proceeded up the stairs.

Stretching out his senses he could hear whispering going on in the headmaster's office but upon reaching the landing outside the door it all stopped. Curious Harry waited until told to enter and looked up at the portraits mounted along the walls of the room. The occupants of said portraits pretended to be asleep with their loud obvious fake snores. Mentally making a note to himself to avoid the other portraits around the castle when speaking of anything, he also thought of ways in which they would help further his plans.

He was brought out of his reverie by a slight cough from the old white haired goon sitting at his desk. Sitting there in his usual patronizing stance galled Harry to no end but he kept the feeling in check and stood in front of the desk waiting for instructions.

"Harry, please take a seat. Lemon Drop?"

Usual lame greeting Harry scoffed mentally. "No thank you sir." He took the indicated seat and kept his eyes downcast in a supposedly submissive role. He felt a tingle brush his mind and immediately sent it on its way somewhere else.

A dank corridor filled his senses and he could almost smell the mold and mildew that flourished there. It was dark and he could barely see the outline of a young student walking down the corridor. A cough attracted his attention and he looked over to see several students in Slytherin robes smiling maliciously at the dark haired boy. The boy cowered and tried to back away but was grabbed from behind and quickly forced to the ground. The boy struggled to get away but to no avail and was soon pummeled by the others. Pain racked the headmaster's senses and he tried to see who it was attacking the boy but it was too dark. The attack continued for several minutes until the boy lay still and unmoving. Footsteps sounded down the corridor and the attackers took off running, the other heavier footsteps quickened their pace. "LUMOS" a voice sounded and light flooded the corridor illuminating the unconscious form and... himself?

Shaken, Dumbledore quickly retreated from the mind and looked curiously at Harry.

"Harry, what was that?" Dumbledore asked in his false calm voice.



“What was what, professor?” he replied innocently.

Dumbledore was now even more confused than ever. During the summer Harry had shown signs of being a powerful occlumens, but now it seemed the boy couldn't even tell that his mind had been breeched. Not wanting to risk Harry's outburst if he admitted to entering his mind, Dumbledore pushed it away and began explaining the lessons he wanted Harry to learn during their time together.

Harry silently accepted and set to work on the potion that Dumbledore had assigned, focusing on the task at hand instead of the laughter that was fighting to escape. Absently he wondered if the headmaster would figure it all out.

Albus pondered what he had seen while he watched Harry diligently preparing the ingredients for the potion he had set. He couldn't remember a time when he had found Harry beaten in the dungeons as the dream had shown him. Did someone plant the image in Harry's mind? Was it the work of Voldemort? How had Harry not detected him when he had done so easily enough before? Thinking further he recalled the image that he had seen this morning and was more perplexed at the memory of the cat chasing the mouse. What were these memories and what did they have to do with Harry. He had expected to find completely different memories upon entering the child's' mind; memories of his time in Azkaban or of his recent fight with his friends, but that was not the case. For once, Albus Dumbledore, greatest wizard of the age had to admit to himself that he was completely baffled.

As Dumbledore was pondering these thoughts, Harry was working on his next move. While preparing the potion he stealthily watched the portraits in the room. About halfway through the lessons, they seemed to forget his presence and started to stir, whispering among themselves about the state of the headmaster. He heard some talking about increasing the vigilance of the portraits around the school and others stating that the young Potter would have to be watched more intensely.

Feeling relief that his room didn't have any portraits hanging on the walls Harry continued to listen until one of the portraits spoke up loudly stating that Professor Lupin was on his way up to the office. Dumbledore lost in thought didn't hear this and Harry waited to see what happened. A knock sounded at the door and Harry had to fight hard not to release his amusement at the sight of a flustered headmaster.

Another portrait spoke up again stating who was waiting outside and Dumbledore regaining control of the situation told Remus to enter. The revelation of how the headmaster always knew who was coming barely shocked Harry, but it was good information to have. If the portraits were that loyal to the headmaster he would have to make sure Ginny and Remus were aware of it.

"What can I do for you Remus?" Albus asked calmly, but shooting a glance at Harry. He sighed in relief to see that his student was not aware of his momentary lapse of awareness.

Remus looked over at Harry, who was ignoring him, and sighed visibly. Glancing back to the headmaster he noticed that his apparent disappointment had registered on the old mans mind. "I only came to see how Harry was doing. I thought maybe....."

"Ah yes Remus, I quite understand." He said motioning for Remus to take a seat. "Harry the hour is almost finished. If your potion is not complete you will be able to return after dinner tonight..."

"No need professor," Harry stated, capping off the vial he had placed his finished potion in. If this was what it was going to be like with the headmaster, he would definitely have to find a way out of the lessons. They weren't going to help him in any way shape or form, he had already mastered these. Setting the vial down on the headmaster's desk he turned to clean up his work area.

"Very good Harry, we will continue on to more advanced topics on Wednesday. You are free to leave."

Harry nodded and left the room with a smirk on his face that none could see. Once he was gone Dumbledore began to speak.

"I'm worried about him Remus. He seems more withdrawn than usual and I can't figure out how to deal with him."

"I understand headmaster, but I think it's in the way you're thinking about it. You don't just 'deal' with Harry; you have to take him as he goes. He will only open up when he is ready and doesn't like to be pushed or treated as a child. I learned that lesson the hard way." He finished regretfully.

"What do you mean Remus?"

"I convinced myself that lessons with you would be in Harry's best interest. I basically forced Harry into agreeing and he has turned away from me. He doesn't talk to me anymore. Our lessons are silent and lacking any of the fervor which he showed over the summer. I'm worried he doesn't have anyone to talk to and that worries me."

"I see. What of his friends?"

"Ha! You've seen how they've been treating him! Demanding he talk to them, demanding he does what they say. They're in no position to demand anything of him, they never were. They are only making the situation worse."

"Yes I have to agree with you after seeing their actions this morning. I will have a talk with them about it. What about Miss Weasley? I've noticed that Harry does not hold the same animosity towards her."

"Well that comes and goes from what I've seen. I know Harry talks to her but I don't know what they talk about or if he has even opened up to her. Every time I find them together, they don't seem to be talking but sitting there silently. I have to admit though that he seems more comfortable around her than anyone else."

"I wonder," Dumbledore mumbled tapping his chin.

"What was that sir?"

“Remus, I would like you to talk with Miss Weasley and try to understand the nature of her relationship with Harry. If it is as I believe, we may be able to break Harry out of this depression he seems to be in.”

“You think that wise? Wouldn’t we be forcing him into something he doesn’t want?”

“Remus, I agree we would initially be forcing him into a situation of our design, but I think in the end it will be rewarding. Now I have a letter to write to the Weasley’s so if you could please let me know how your conversation with Miss Weasley goes by tomorrow, I would appreciate it.”

Recognizing his dismissal, he stood and after a cordial goodbye he turned to leave, smirking that Harry’s plan was pure genius. Everything was falling into place, tonight he would have to see what Harry and Ginny thought about this little discussion.

For the remainder of the day Harry ignored everyone else and kept to himself. He didn’t miss the glares his former friends shot his way though and mentally scoffed at them. He was pleased to learn at dinner that the headmaster had called them both up to his office. Only vaguely curious what it was about he finished and set off to the Quidditch pitch by himself making sure that Ginny was acting appropriately to his departure and that it was also noticed by the headmaster.

Taking his Firebolt out of his pocket he enlarged it and set off. The exhilarating feeling that always accompanied flying filled him and he soared around the pitch happier than he had been in a long while. All thoughts vanished from his mind, no schemes or plots, just plain emptiness and the thrill of flight. Diving rapidly toward the ground he became aware of Ginny’s presence but decided to ignore it for now in case anyone was watching.

In fact there was another watching from his office window high up in the castle. Dumbledore, upon seeing Harry leave the Great Hall in a right fit became worried about what his charge would do. Asking Remus to keep a watch on Harry he quickly left for his office. Before

reaching the gargoyle he heard footsteps behind him and turned to see Miss Granger and Mr. Weasley approaching timidly. Sighing to himself he waved them over and they all headed up to his office. Dumbledore would rather not have to deal with the two but also knew it would be better to get this over with now rather than later. After a short dressing down to both of them he dismissed the shocked teens. He only hoped that it didn't create further problems in the long run.

Feeling the onset of a headache he turned to look out his window expecting to get lost in the fascinating view of endless stars in the night sky. Instead his eyes focused on a figure screaming through the air over the Quidditch pitch. Without having to think he knew it was Harry. The boy always was a natural when it came to flying and he couldn't begrudge Harry this bit of release. He knew Harry was not currently in any danger and felt perhaps this was something that the boy needed.

Movement along the ground of the entrance to the pitch caught his eye and he squinted to make out who it was. At first he thought it might be Remus but the figure was too short. Clouds cleared in the sky basking the pitch in the light of the moon and he saw a glint of red on the figure and knew immediately it was Miss Weasley. He chuckled to himself at the implications of this sighting but stored them away for future reference. She was a dedicated and stubborn young girl that was for sure. Not really unlike her mother in that respect he recalled. His conviction that Miss Weasley was indeed the one that would bring Harry back was strengthened and he felt restless waiting for news from both the Weasleys and Remus.

The next morning was once again fraught with unpleasantness. Although it seemed that Mr. Weasley and Miss Granger had taken his talk to heart, another player was thrown into the mix. As he came to the Great Hall he couldn't miss the argument that was taking place between a very irate Harry and Professor Snape. Minerva McGonagall stood close by, her lips pursed tighter than he had ever seen in disapproval and a smirking Draco Malfoy leaning against the doorway.

"I will not serve detention with you ever again you slimy old bat!" Harry shouted.

"You will do as you are told Potter! I am a teacher and therefore demand respect you ungrateful wretch."

"Really Severus!"

"Minerva, I'm handling this situation. Please do not interfere."

"What may I ask is the problem?" Dumbledore's ever calm voice interspersed.

"Headmaster," Severus turned almost in surprise, "Potter here thinks it is his right to go around cursing innocent students whenever he feels like it. I caught him in the act and have issued the appropriate punishment." He finished smugly.

"Appropriate punishment!" Harry shouted in disbelief. "A months worth of detention is appropriate punishment for only defending myself against attacks from junior death eaters? In your dreams!"

"Potter...."

"Severus please. Harry what happened?"

"Ferret face decided to taunt me about Azkaban and then had the nerve to cast a bludgeoning hex at me when he didn't get the response he wanted. I merely cast a shield that rebounded the curse back at him, which he unfortunately dodged. Snape here decided to ignore the fact that I was attacked first."

"He lies headmaster! I saw him cast the spell." Snape shouted pointing furiously at Harry.

"This is easily solved Severus. Draco your wand please?"

"What? Why do you want my wand."

"Headmaster, I must protest! This is ridiculous." Severus shouted, he did not want the headmaster to find out he was protecting Draco.

"Severus, be quiet. Mr. Malfoy, your wand!" he demanded.

Draco looking like he wanted nothing more than to crawl under a rock to escape slowly retrieved his wand and held it out to the headmaster. After taking the wand Dumbledore cast the prior incantatum spell which revealed that Draco had indeed cast a bludgeoning curse. Handing back the wand to Draco he turned to Harry expectantly. He could see how angry Harry was but wanted to make sure that he was seen being fair. Reluctantly Harry handed over his wand for the same spell to be cast on it. Like he had stated, he had only cast a shield charm.

"I believe Severus that the punishment you set for Mr. Potter will be transferred to Mr. Malfoy seeing as the truth has been revealed."

"Headmaster....."

"Enough Severus. Mr. Malfoy will serve the detentions with Mr. Filch or Hagrid every night for a month." Turning to Malfoy he continued. "Mr. Malfoy I expect you to take this opportunity to reflect upon your actions. I will not tolerate attacks on other students." Dumbledore then turned to Harry, "Mr. Potter, I expected better of you, you must learn to control your temper and I will not tolerate disrespect for the teachers appointed to this school. Now both of you run along to breakfast."

Harry fumed at this redress and let it show; instead of abiding Dumbledore's command to go to breakfast he stalked out of the castle.

Dumbledore sighed and rubbed his temple feeling the onset of another headache. He noticed the disapproval on Minerva's face and the smug smirk that surfaced on Severus. Sighing again he ignored them and set off for his own breakfast. Vaguely he caught a glimpse of red shoot past him and knew it was Miss Weasley setting off to find Harry.

"Headmaster?" Remus Lupin's concerned voice queried as he took his seat in the Great Hall.

"Ah, Remus, it's seems as though I handled that rather badly."

"Yes you did. Harry is not one for forgiving indiscretions against him."

"It would seem that I continually succeed in pushing the boy further away."

"Malfoy and Harry have been enemies since the first day they started here. The fact that Severus continually lets Malfoy get away with his bullying while punishing Harry for it doesn't help the matter. Your actions only serve in furthering the belief that Severus and Malfoy can get away with it. You should not have reprimanded Harry for his actions as he was only doing what he said in defending himself."

"I will have to talk with him tomorrow about this."

"I don't think it will do any good headmaster; Harry is not one for idle chatter. He bases his belief in people upon their actions, not what they say."

Dumbledore reluctantly agreed but changed the topic. "So were you able to talk with Miss Weasley?"

"Yes, and I'm afraid it's not all that good." Remus sadly stated.

"What is it Remus?"

"Well Harry has admitted to Ginny he is still having nightmares, they aren't visions," he quickly added as he noticed the headmaster sit up straighter. "Ginny has only been able to get out of him that he dreams of his time in Azkaban and the betrayal he feels from everyone. He doesn't know who to trust and feels alone and unloved. For some reason he doesn't believe anyone cares about him, that he's only some kind of weapon to be used and manipulated. Ginny of course is confused about this, as am I, but he won't say anything further. Do you understand what he's talking about?"

"I'm afraid I do not know what this means Remus." Remus inwardly grimaced at the bold face lie. "I believe Ginny is helping Harry a great



deal if he has been able to get that much out of Harry.” Dumbledore finished.

“I’m not sure. Ginny is confused but tries to comfort him. Sometimes he accepts but others he just brushes her off. She’s determined to help him though.”

“That’s good to hear Remus. I suggest we continue to allow Ginny and Harry some time alone to work through this.”

“They barely have time to themselves as it is. It will take a long time, I’m afraid this year is going to be a long one.”

“I do not believe so. I have a plan that may well succeed and I am currently awaiting an answer. Once I do, you will have a role to play as well, and I urge you to accept it when it is time. Can you do this Remus?”

“Anything to help Harry headmaster.” Remus answered fervently.

That night Remus, Ginny and Harry sat discussing the recent events in Remus’s office. Making sure there were no portraits and multiple privacy charms were cast, Remus called Dobby to get refreshments for them.

“Master Lupin called Dobby sir?” the excited house elf squeaked.

“Yes Dobby, would you be able to get something light for us to eat, we don’t want to be an inconvenience.” Harry asked kindly.

“Master Harry Potter sir!” Dobby squealed in delight and ran and hugged Harry’s legs. “Tis no inconvenience sir, Dobby lives to serve the great Master Harry Potter sir!”

“Dobby....Dobby please!” Harry said exasperatedly trying to remove the overzealous house elf from his knees. “Please don’t tell anyone where we are or that we’re together.”

“Anything for master Harry sir! Can I do anything else for master?”

“Dobby why do you keep calling me master? You’re a free elf, and my friend, just call me Harry.”

“Oh Master Harry is to kind to Dobby!” the elf cried.

“Dobby please, no master, just Harry.”

“Dobby cannot do that sir, when Master Harry freed Dobby, Dobby made a vow to protect and serve Master Harry.”

“But you work for Hogwarts, don’t you Dobby?” Ginny asked gently.

“Oh yes Harry Potters Weasey. But when Master leaves school, Dobby leaves with him.” He said proudly.

“What!” Harry exclaimed shocking the poor elf. Immediately Dobby’s expression changed.

“Oh bad Dobby, Master Harry Potter is too good for Dobby! Dobby is bad house elf to assume great Harry Potter would want Dobby!” he cried and lunged forward to bang his head on the table.

Harry immediately grabbed Dobby’s small shoulders and pulled him away. Turning Dobby around he forced the elf to look up at him. “Dobby, please, I didn’t say I didn’t want you, I’m just surprised is all. I thought you wanted freedom?”

“Dobby likes being able to make own choices and wear clothes but Dobby isn’t liking being free. Dobby is loosing magic when not serving his master.”

“You’re loosing magic? I didn’t know that was possible.” Harry said sinking back onto his heels.

“House elves live to serve Harry, their magic is strongest when they serve a family. It is even greater when they are happy in that service.” Remus supplied kindly.

“So, because you are working for Hogwarts and being paid for it, and not serving me, you’re magic is leaving you?”

Dobby could only nod weakly.

“Is the same thing happening to Winky?” Harry asked concerned for the other elf.

“Yes, Winky is not doing good. She has not found another master to serve and is quickly failing. Dobby is frightened for her.”

Not really liking what he was thinking but knowing it was the right thing to do Harry pressed. “Dobby, would Winky like to work for me too?”

“Oh yes Harry Potter sir. Winky is liking young master after all he’s done.”

”Well that settles it. How about you two come visit me in my room tomorrow night and we’ll work this all out.”

“Yes maste.....I mean Harry sir! Dobby goes and gets you nice snack.” With a pop the house elf was gone. Harry sat in silence wondering what on earth he was going to do with two overeager house elves.

“Well Harry, looks like you have two new allies to help your cause.” Remus chuckled. Harry shot him a hateful glare but Remus ignored it and laughed harder.

Harry heard Ginny giggle from beside him and couldn’t help that it lightened his spirit somewhat.

“You have to admit Harry, they could be very useful. I think you’ve done the right thing. I know you like Dobby and Winky, so do I. I’m proud of you.” Ginny said seriously, but still giggling slightly.

“Well, I’ll have to figure out what to do with them later I guess. So Moony, how were your discussions with bumble bee?” Remus frowned at the disrespectful name and change of topic but answered none the less.

"Well he definitely believes your act. He's even written to Ginny's parents about something. I can only assume what that's about."

"I can answer that." Ginny perked up. "It seems the headmaster thinks that I am a good influence on Harry and has asked if I can be placed in the head dorm. It seems as though Dumbledore is planning on moving all three of us into the suite of rooms together and moving Hermione out to another area."

"Really? How'd you get all that?" Harry asked surprised only that they might have the entire head dorm to themselves.

"Well the twins seemed to have come across a rather lengthy letter Dumbledore wrote to my parents and made a copy to send to me. My parents of course don't suspect the twins of anything. Honestly, my parents are members of the Order and can't even take simple precautions around their own house. They know how my brothers are and yet they still act....Oh they're so frustrating!"

"Calm down Ginny," Remus said as he reached over and patted her shoulder.

"Do you know what their reply was?" Harry asked.

"Only that they're meeting with Dumbledore on Friday sometime to discuss it. I don't know if they'll agree or not. I'm starting to even wonder if I really know my parents considering that they're even willing to discuss me living with a teenage boy. They're always warning me of the rampaging hormones of boys, it doesn't make sense since that they're considering this."

"Well actually it does in a sense. They've always followed Dumbledore blindly, add to it that they feel 'oh so terrible' for their betrayal of me and stealing from me that they would do almost anything to make it up to me. We just need to discuss what will actually push them over the edge so to speak to agree with Dumbledore's plan."

"I'm not so sure I like what you're implying Harry. It sounds as though my parents would actually give me away in order to appease their guilt." She said sadly.

"I'm sorry Ginny; I didn't mean to make it sound so harsh. I know you love your parents and wouldn't take that away from you. I loved them too, but they hurt me so bad. I shouldn't be trying to sway you away from them just because of what happened to me. Maybe this isn't a good plan after all." He said truly sorry at what he had implied.

"No Harry. I know you're sorry. I don't necessarily like all these manipulations but the more I see the more I understand that we are not actively forcing anyone to do what we want. Dumbledore is sending out letters asking people to do his will and my parents are acting of their own choice. It just hurts to believe that they are not the people I thought they were, that everything they taught us growing up was all a lie."

"It's not a lie Ginny." Remus spoke comfortingly. "What they taught you was to be your own person and you have become that. Just because they aren't following their own advice doesn't mean it's bad advice. I think they truly want to help and have reservations about this whole thing. They do love you Ginny."

"I know, but it's so hypocritical!" she raged, punching the armrest of the chair she was sitting in.

"If you don't want to do this Gin, I'll understand. We'll find some other way to train you."

"You're not getting out of the bet that easily Potter! That is of course unless you admit defeat?" she asked with a sly smile.

"No way!" Harry shouted in mock indignation. "I never renege on a bet!"

"So, anyway, it may hurt but I'll get over it. What are we going to do next?"

Harry and Remus were stunned into silence at the quick turnaround Ginny had made. If it worried them they didn't let it show. They would deal with it later once they were in more secure surroundings.

## Chapter 16-Falling into Place

Early the next morning Harry set out for his regular workout. Upon completion of his run, he became aware that the normal number of giggling and pointing girls had increased. As he looked over he was appalled to see a few boys among them. He hated all this attention, but he had to admit that it boosted his ego quite a bit. He was proud of what he had been able to accomplish through his hard work and concentration and how that made him look now, and he did it all without the help of the meddling Dumbledore and his cronies. Still on the thin side he knew the muscles that rippled his body looked good and that this is what caused his workout to become the daily morning entertainment. It was nice to know he had made improvements but all he really cared about was how Ginny looked at him. Resigning himself to the fact that he wouldn't escape the attention any time soon he blocked out his onlookers and completed his routine.

After showering in the locker rooms at the Quidditch pitch, he headed into the Great Hall for breakfast fully aware of his entourage of fans. Barely had he been able to sit down when the annoying voice of Draco Malfoy cut into his thoughts.

"Think you're so special Potter! Your luck won't hold up much longer. You'll pay for what you've done and I'll be there to watch you fall!"

"You know, it's people like you that continually further my belief that this war won't last much longer Malfoy." Harry laughed.

Malfoy flushed red in anger and grasped his already drawn wand tighter.

"You're Dark Lord's misguided belief in the power and purity of purebloods, has severely strained his resources considering the lack of intelligence they have been showing lately. Tell me Draco, has your father turned up yet?" Harry asked pointedly.

"How dare you insult the greatest pureblooded wizard who ever lived!" Malfoy hissed ignoring the question about his father.

Harry laughed once again. "Oh that's rough! Are you really that stupid? Tell me how exactly Voldemort became a pureblood when his father was nothing but a simple muggle. He's only one step up from those you purebloods despise the most, practically a mudblood himself!" Harry said his voice hardening dangerously.

"How dare you!" Malfoy shouted in rage.

"I believe you already said that." Harry stated simply, then continued, "I dare because I can. I've warned you before Malfoy and you've continually ignored it. Now leave!" he said in a deadly whisper with his back still turned to the irritating Slytherin. He felt Malfoy raise his wand to hex him and with an unseen flick of his wrist Malfoy froze in place.

To everyone else it looked as though Malfoy was reconsidering his actions. What they didn't realize was that Harry had sent Malfoy a mental reminder of what would happen to him if he chose to continue on his current path.

Malfoy froze as everything around him turned pitch black, he couldn't move. A low growling began and it didn't seem to be too far away. Hot breath rained down upon his neck and fear rose like a tidal wave within him. He tried to shoot away but was held firmly in place by an unknown force. The growling grew louder and more menacing. Something was stalking him! He flinched violently as something hard and furry brushed up against him and his heartbeat quickened threefold. His eyes darted around in the darkness but still nothing could be seen. The hot breath was now flowing constantly down his neck and he squeezed his eyes shut in terror. The blow came quickly and unexpectedly from behind and he found himself facing flat down against the ground. Trying desperately to crane his neck to see behind him, he found only blackness.

Out of no where brilliant emerald green eyes sparked with gold penetrated the darkness, eyes that held no mercy, eyes that promised a painful death. The eyes didn't waiver and Malfoy was transfixed by them. He could only watch helplessly as they drew closer to him. They were oddly familiar but he couldn't place where he had seen them before, but then again his mind was not functioning

rationality at the current time. Light started to seep into the dark, outlining the face of his attacker, only it wasn't a face so to speak. It was the darkened muzzle of an animal filled with numerous razor sharp teeth and he realized in that instant what he was facing. He had encountered the creature only once before on the Hogwarts express. Just as he had back then, he lost control of his bodily functions.

The creature vanished and Malfoy's vision cleared bringing into focus the view of the Great hall and then the confused stares of his fellow students. Next to register in his mind was the uncomfortable wetness of his robes. Blinking rapidly he stared down in horror at himself then back to the room at large, gulping quite visibly.

Many students were just beginning to notice Malfoy's predicament, not understanding why the blond Slytherin had frozen in his spot. Soon enough however, the whispers and sniggers of laughter broke out upon seeing Malfoy wet himself for some unknown reason. The only person with a wand drawn was Malfoy and everyone was quite sure that he hadn't cast any spells on himself.

Harry ignored the ferret and proceeded to eat as if nothing happened. Malfoy, thoroughly humiliated nearly ran out of the Great hall amidst the chorus of laughter. Nothing else was said, for no one knew what had caused Malfoy to act that way.

Transfiguration did nothing for Harry's current mood. McGonagall had them all conjuring various objects from a list of 20 inanimate objects of variable size. Harry of course was having no problem with the assignment and started to elaborate on the designs. Adding intricate details to the pieces of furniture and household trappings, he created elegant yet comfortable masterpieces. Professor McGonagall was amazed at what the boy was doing, she tried valiantly not to stare at what he created but it was of no use. She also tried to tell herself she should have expected this after his performance during the placement tests but she couldn't get beyond the fact the he was so young.

True, he was now 17 and considered an adult in the wizarding world, but she still saw the pale thin 11 year old that first showed at



Hogwarts 7 years ago. Shaking herself, she looked at the young man and was truly shocked at how much he had actually changed. Taller now, he was no longer the shortest student among his peers, his shoulders had broadened and even through the robes he wore, his muscles were pronounced. His face was more angular and defined, a very attractive young man if she did say so herself. His startling emerald eyes shown with a myriad of emotions, but they weren't the eyes a young man should have. They were filled with a lifetime of experience hard learned. He held himself with a confidence and determination that wasn't evident just a year ago and she marveled at the remarkable differences. It didn't look to her as if he was brooding, but then again she trusted in the headmaster. Dumbledore had said Harry was having a difficult time readjusting to life and had already displayed several outbursts of anger and depression. She didn't see that in the boy before her. She was startled out of her observations as her eyes rose once again to meet his and she realized he was aware of her scrutiny. Forcing the blush down, which was threatening to rise to her face, she pursed her lips and addressed him.

"Mr. Potter," she started, "I would like to talk to you after class."

He nodded in response, and she moved along to inspect the work of the other students.

Hermione was in her usual tiff. At first she had been concentrating solely on her assignments, but upon noticing the ease with which Harry was moving through the tasks, quickly became distracted and very annoyed. 'How could he perform such advanced magic? She never saw him studying even though he was always secluded away in his room doing Merlin knows what! She was the one that was the top of all lessons and had been since their first year. She and Ron had received special training from the Order, not Harry. Harry had barely been average in his studies and had spent a year in Azkaban without access to anything, how could he have learned all this? It wasn't fair that she had put so much into her studies when he hadn't! Why did he have such abilities?' She glared jealously at him but faltered upon seeing the wicked smirk that was returned to her. 'Had he performed some Dark Arts ritual to gain the knowledge and power? It must be!' she convinced herself. It was the only logical

conclusion to her book learned intelligence, she'd discuss it with Ron later, and then they'd speak with Dumbledore about it.

She grimaced at the thought of speaking with the headmaster again. The dressing down he have given them both the other day had greatly alarmed her. They were warned in no uncertain terms to stop badgering Harry and only to observe him from a distance. She couldn't understand why all of a sudden Dumbledore was bowing to Harry's every whim. Granted Harry was innocent of all he had been accused of a year ago and they were all very sorry about it. They had apologized but Harry was being childish and wouldn't forgive them, she couldn't understand why. Huffing loudly she glared once more at Harry and returned to her work vowing to figure out what was going on.

Ron was having similar thoughts to Hermione letting his jealousy of the 'Great Harry Potter' consume him. The fact that Harry had had a hard life and seen more horrors and hardships than anyone should never entered his thoughts. The fact that he had betrayed his best friend was only a minor nuisance, he had apologized hadn't he? His family had apologized so why wouldn't Harry forgive them. He was furious over the fact that Harry had taken away the money they had become accustomed to. Harry had so much and hadn't his family taken him under their wing? They had all treated him as a Weasley, fed him, given him a home, but what did he give them in return, nothing! Then when they finally are compensated, he finds a way to take it all back! Now he comes back and acts like everyone owes HIM something, like he's better than everyone else. He'd show Harry, who was better then who. Last year it was Ron that had restarted the DA and led them with the help of Hermione. It was Ron who helped them to prepare against the war ahead. It was Ron who the Order had decided needed extra training to defend himself. He was the one that would make a difference in this war, not bloody pitiful Potter! Harry was nothing compared to himself. Harry had been locked away for a year and was no where near advanced in magical training no matter how he had cheated on his placement tests! There was no other explanation! It was pathetic that the headmaster had even deigned to put Potter in seventh year lessons, there was no way he could keep up, let alone compete against any of the other seventh years. He was the leader now. Maybe he should invite Potter to the DA meetings to

show him just how far behind everyone else he really was. Yes that would put the prat in his place!

The bell rang signaling the end of the lesson, cutting off any further thoughts. Ron and Hermione walked out of the classroom together only sparing a slight glance at Harry who hadn't moved from his seat.

Harry, however knew better than to trust the seemingly un-tarried attitudes of the two Gryffindors. He could sense them waiting just outside the now closed door.

"Mr. Potter, I would like to speak with you about your lessons today. It seems that you have already mastered the tasks which usually take most students until the end of the first term to accomplish. Since you're already taking only the minimum required lessons, I cannot let you test out of this subject. I will therefore need you to advise me on what you have been able to accomplish and what you haven't." she finished waiting expectantly for an answer.

Harry formed the answer in his head before speaking up. "I'm not exactly sure what you're looking for professor, but I was able to study both the sixth and seventh year texts over the summer. It wasn't until school started that I could actually practice since I didn't have a wand. I've just been studying really hard." He answered innocently not even batting an eye at the lies he told.

Minerva McGonnagal stared hard at the young man before her noticing how he didn't actually look her in the eyes, but was still addressing her respectfully. This didn't look like the same Harry Potter they had dealt with over the summer for those brief weeks. "Very well Mr. Potter, it seems as though I will have to test you further to see where I should begin your lessons. If I'm not mistaken your next lesson is free. Next week this same time I will have a test ready for you to take during your free period then. You are dismissed for now."

As Harry stood up and gathered his things to leave she watched him go wondering exactly what the boy was capable of. He was still polite but there was something harder about him, she couldn't place it.

Harry on the other hand was cursing himself for letting his guard down enough for the sharp transfiguration professor to catch on that he was more advanced than he let on. He'd have to contain himself to keep her from finding out exactly how advanced he was until he was ready to reveal it all.

Forgetting momentarily about Ron and Hermione waiting outside, he was caught off guard once again when he nearly ran into them. Stepping back he just stared at them wondering what they wanted now. He caught the quick looks they shot each other and was surprised when Ron smirked and spoke up.

"We've decided to allow you to attend the new DA meetings this year. 'Mione and I have been teaching it for the last year and we think it would help you catch up to the rest of us." He said full of arrogance.

Harry chuckled internally at the display before him. Hermione even smirked righteously at Ron's statement and he quelled the urge to smack it right off her face. Ron continued to look smug and was obviously waiting for a response.

"Thanks, but no thanks. I have other things occupying my time at present."

"What!" they both shouted incredulous at being turned down.

"I said NO! I don't need to learn anything that the two of you have to teach. I've been keeping up just fine on my own." He answered neutrally but it seemed to only infuriate the two.

"Then why did McGonnagal keep you after lessons if you're not having problems?"

"That's none of your business." Harry said and made to walk away, but was stopped when a hand grabbed his arm roughly jerking him to a stop.

Harry bit down the rage that swelled and turned around. "Ron, I would strongly advise you NEVER to do that again?" he bit out through grated teeth and yanked his arm away from Ron's grasp.

“Ha, what could you do about it? You’ve only a 5th year education; I could easily block anything you could throw at me! We’re giving you a chance to learn more and you refuse it, you’re arrogance has only grown. You’ve always thought you were better than us, now when you know it’s not true you back away. You’re such a coward!” Ron sneered, reminding Harry of a certain Malfoy.

“Seems you have a very short term memory Weasley. If I remember correctly you weren’t able to block me when I had you lane flat on your back in the Great Hall. You wouldn’t be able to stand against anything I could throw at you and you’d be wise to remember that.”

Both Ron and Hermione scoffed at the outlandish statement but were confused as they found themselves outside the castle and near the lake. Neither could remember how they had gotten there. The last they remembered was talking to Harry about the DA and his audacious refusal to attend.

Harry laughed all the way up to his room after he got rid of the annoying duo. Today he would take time to meditate and seek out his nemesis. As he sat Indian style on the floor of his room meditating he sorted through all the random thoughts of the day and focused on the mental connection between himself and Voldemort. Stealthily he crept into Tom’s mind and found that the Dark Lord was awake but still pretty weak, he was also furious and bent upon revenge.

“Wormtail!” he rasped from his throne.

“Yes my master?” the pathetic figure bowed low kissing the hem of Voldemorts robes.

“Any news of the Potter brat? I grow tired of waiting for my revenge.”

“He is at Hogwarts my lord, but no one has dared leave while you were sick my lord.”

“I am surrounded by incompetents!” Voldemort roared, at least he would have if his voice wasn’t so weak. Still not capable of standing he shifted impatiently in his throne thinking of how to get back at the

brat. "Send for the inner circle Wormtail, we will attack Diagon Alley and show those fools who is the master!"

Harry remained still and quiet waiting for the plan to unfold. He could try to blast him again but it wouldn't be as strong as last time and he needed to conserve his energy. He couldn't afford to be unconscious for a couple days while at school, it would definitely be noticed and put a wrench into his carefully laid plans. It was good that Voldemort was furious with him, making it much easier for Harry to lure him to the final end. Knowing he would have to be careful over the next several months he withdrew from the foreign mind.

Ginny, meanwhile was looking for Harry and was quickly becoming frustrated. During lunch Dumbledore had requested her to meet him after lunch to discuss Harry. She knew that this was inevitable but wanted to talk to Harry before it happened. She was nervous and unsure that the plans they had made wouldn't be enough. Now it was time for the meeting and she was a wreck. Standing outside the gargoyle she practiced the meditative techniques Harry had shown her and found that they were working pretty well as she slowly was able to calm down. A few more minutes and she was ready to face the headmaster. Speaking the password clearly she walked up the spiral steps and waited for the headmaster to allow her entrance.

"Ah yes, Miss Weasley, please come in and have a seat. Lemon Drop?"

Ginny tried not to laugh at the offer, but wasn't too successful. Harry had said that the headmaster would offer the candies that it was like an obsessive ritual. Every time someone came to his office he offered them. He also told her that he suspected the headmaster had some sort of calming draught or mild truth serum in them because they tasted funny. He had tried to break down the components on several of the lemon drops before but there was some sort of charm on them that destroyed the drops before he could discover what was in them. This only served to make him more suspicious and warn Ginny and Remus away from eating them.

"No thank you sir," she finally responded and she noticed the twinkle in the headmasters eyes brighten. "What am I here for?"

“Straight to the point ah Miss Weasley? I have brought you here to talk about Mr. Potter.”

“I don’t understand sir, what could I have to do with Harry?”

“Well you see, you seem to be quite close to the boy and I would like to know how he is doing. Harry will not talk to anyone and has even stopped talking to Professor Lupin and we are all worried about him. Miss Granger and your brother have told me that they believe he is still having nightmares. If this is the case we must find some way to help him.”

“He doesn’t talk to me all that often either headmaster.” She answered and then felt the strangest thing. A tingling sensation started in her mind and she was able to recognize it for what it was, the headmaster was trying to read her memories. ‘Don’t worry Gin, I’m here,’ she heard the voice of Harry in her mind, ‘I’ve already isolated us so Dumbledore won’t hear or notice us. I’ve also limited him to viewing only those memories that he expects to find.’

‘I’m glad you’re here Harry. I was so worried earlier that it wouldn’t work...’

‘I’m hurt you have so little faith in me Gin.’ Harry responded in a saddened tone.

‘If you’d let me finish Mr. Potter! I was about to tell you I did those techniques you taught me and they actually worked in calming me down. I even felt it when Dumbledore entered my mind.’

‘Sorry about that. I should’ve known better. That’s really good to hear, you’re training should go faster since you’ve pretty much gotten that down.’ He said sincerely sorry that he had underestimated her.

‘You should be! Well anyway, so what do we do now?’

‘We wait until he’s satisfied that there’s nothing else to look for. When he’s done, just act like you don’t know what’s happened. He won’t

admit that he's searched your mind so it shouldn't be too hard to play along.'

'What are you letting him look at? Just what we talked about right?' she asked mentally forecasting her forbearance about what the headmaster and Harry, for that matter, could see.

'Don't worry Gin, I'm only letting him see what he thinks he already knows. He'll see the memory of some of the conversations we had about nightmares, some about my fights with Hermione, Ron and Remus. He'll also see how you were able to comfort me and a few about how you still like me.' He added quietly, and grimaced when he felt Gin's attention immediately spike. 'I'm sorry about that last one Gin, I know you're not comfortable with that but I think it will help.' He finished quickly and preparing himself for her wrath.

'So you know that I still like you?' she asked quietly and with a small amount of fear. Harry could also sense that she was preparing herself for him to rebuke her and tell her he didn't feel that way about her. He was glad she wasn't angry but his heart ached seeing how sad she was thinking he didn't return her feelings. She was so wrong, but how to go about telling her.

'Yes Gin, I know. I'm sorry for how I've treated you in the past. I know it wasn't easy for you. I'm sorry for wasting so much time searching for something that was standing right in front of me. I've never claimed to be a genius or anything and my experience with dating has been a less than joyful experience. I've always had difficulty expressing my feelings and I just hope you'll be able to give me a second chance.'

'It's okay Harry, don't worry about it. I never expected you to....wait! What did you say? You mean that you weren't just playing around when we kissed that you actually..'

'Gin what would you say to being my girlfriend? Mind, we can't really let anyone know about it yet but I would really like to give it a chance. You're the only one that makes me feel like I do when you're around and....'



‘Shush Harry.’ She whispered, ‘You know I’d love to be your girlfriend! In fact I believe you know just how much I’ve wanted to be for a while now.’

‘Really! Great! Then my answer to your question about the Halloween ball is a definite yes!’

Ginny laughed at his boyish exuberance and wished she was with him physically to show him how much she wanted him.

‘I know Gin, I wish you were here now too! Don’t forget that since I’m in your mind I can understand your thoughts.’

‘That’s not fair Harry James Potter! Why can’t I sense yours?’

‘Well because I’m blocking myself so as not to be detected. Later I can show you if you want to know what I’m thinking?’

‘I would love to. So how about tonight after dinner, we can make it look like another consoling session.’

‘Sorry Gin, but I can’t tonight. I have to talk to Dobby and Winky and get the whole house elf thing sorted out. I’m not exactly sure what to do with them. I think they could become very useful sticking around Hogwarts but I don’t want Dumbledore to figure it out. Then there’s also the fact that we have to make it believable for everyone.’

‘House elves are very loyal Harry. Dobby is especially loyal to you and since you’ve decided to take them in I don’t think you’ll have a problem with them. If anything, they are way too eager to do anything you ask of them.’

‘Yeah, you’re right, but I’m not too sure what they’ll say when I ask them to search Hogwarts.’

‘What are you looking for in Hogwarts?’

‘Well your brother and Miss Granger somehow still think I’ve got the Marauders Map and I don’t know what happened to my other things before I went to Azkaban. Although I only care about my dad’s

invisibility cloak and Hedwig. No one seems to know where they are and I suspect Dumblebums got his hands in it. Even if I were to ask him straight out I doubt he'd tell me truthfully what happened to them.'

'I'm sorry Harry. I haven't seen Hedwig since she flew away from the burrow when you were taken. Do you really think Dumbledore would keep your things from you?' At Harry's incredulous expression she continued, 'I'm sorry, it just takes some getting use to that a person you've thought was the embodiment of the light all your life could be so bad.'

'I know how you feel. Anyway I don't want to think about it right now. Dumbledore's done and I have another lesson with him shortly. I'll talk to you later.'

'Okay, by Harry. I really can't wait until we can talk more privately.'

Things went smoothly the rest of the day and Dobby and Winky even agreed to search the castle to see what they could turn up. Dobby even volunteered to search Dumbledore's office when Harry told him about the headmaster trying to hide Harry's wand.

Later Harry set out to the Quidditch pitch for his nightly relaxation when he sensed the Slytherin evil trio lying in wait for him just beyond the entrance. Shaking his head at the inability for some people to learn he walked confidently forward. When he reached the stands he wandlessly stunned the two brainless idiots who always accompanied Malfoy. Harry could've predicted the reaction of Malfoy, as the blond shot out from his hiding place and tried to run away. Reaching out with his magic he lifted the boy off the ground and shot him forcefully through the air aiming for the lake. Sure enough, his marksmanship was confirmed when a distance splash sounded through the night air.

Confirming that he was once again alone he set off into the night on his Firebolt.

The next morning found Harry at his usual place in the Great Hall for breakfast. Neville and Ginny had joined him and they were enjoying the calm silent presence of each other.

“So Harry, do you think you’ll be starting the DA again?” Neville asked between sips.

“I don’t think so Nev. Besides I thought Ron and Hermione were running it now.”

“Yeah they are, but now that you’re back everyone is wondering if you’ll take it up again. They really don’t like how Ron and Hermione run it. Ron is too arrogant and basically just roams around the room acting like he’s better than anyone. He doesn’t help anyone learn anything. Hermione’s the one that comes up with what everyone learns but it basically sticks to things that will most likely show up on O. or NEWTs. It’s nothing like when you ran it.”

Harry openly laughed at Neville’s view of the DA, surprising those around them. “Oh that’s wonderful! Do the dynamic duo know that people think that?”

“People have tried to tell them, they’ve even tried to offer topics that people wanted to learn but Ron and Hermione just scoff at their ideas and say they know better what everyone should learn.” Ginny answered. “The number of people actually participating in the DA by the end of last year was pretty low.”

“That doesn’t sound good,” Harry replied thoughtfully. “I guess they are keeping to why we originally started the DA but doesn’t sound as if it’s actually helping anyone if they don’t want to attend.”

“To a certain extent it helps as review for those taking exams, if, and that’s a very big if, they can stand being around those two for a couple hours.” Ginny whispered.

“There’s a lot of people that never did believe what you were accused of Harry.” Neville solemnly stated looking Harry right in the eyes. Harry was taken aback by this show of courage from the shy Gryffindor. “A lot of people that stood up for you even with Hermione and Ron crucifying your name. They still stand by you Harry.”

“Um...I don’t know what to say Neville. Thanks? I didn’t know.”

“We didn’t expect you to know Harry, with you away and all, but we want you to know now for whatever it’s worth.”

Not really trusting the words, Harry briefly scanned Neville’s mind and found he was telling the truth. There were people that had believed him and stood by him, people he had never really known beyond lessons or even a chance encounter but they held steadfast in their belief. It astounded him that those people could get it right when his Family, the people that knew him best, couldn’t.

“Thanks for that Neville, you don’t know how much that means to me.”

“No problem Harry, but would you at least consider teaching us again?”

“I’ll think about it Nev.”

“Think about what?” the rude and unwelcome voice of the noisy and always interfering Hermione Granger interrupted their conversation.

“Nothing,” Neville answered quickly.

“What are you three up to?” Ron the ever faithful and dumb sidekick piped up.

“If we’re up to something it’s none of your business.” Ginny retorted.

“It is if you’re planning to start up an illegal club.” Hermione said lifting her nose in the air haughtily.

Harry was angered that they had the audacity to listen in on their conversation and wondered how much they had actually heard. Once again using a little Legilimency he learned that they had only overheard Neville asking him to think about teaching again.

“You’re one to talk about starting illegal clubs Granger, or don’t you remember how the DA was started?” Harry bit out.

“It’s not illegal, it’s a fully sanctioned club. The Headmaster himself gave us permission to continue it. It’s your own fault if you don’t want to attend with everyone else.”

“Yeah,” Ron readily agreed, “You’re so busy now a days, I bet you don’t even have time to play Quidditch. Is that what we’re all going to hear next! You’re a lame excuse for a Gryffindor.”

Harry fought hard not to hex Ron into oblivion. If he didn’t know better, he would have guessed Ron and Hermione were under some type of spell for how stupid and petty they were acting. Didn’t they see that treating him this way was just lengthening the already enormous gap between them. If they wanted forgiveness for their previous mistakes it would now take a miracle.

“As a matter of fact Weasley, I’m not going to be able to play Quidditch this year.” He said matter-of-factly and waited for the explosion.

“What!” Ron yelled loud enough that everyone in the Great Hall stopped and stared. Hermione almost looked as incredulous as Ron did.

“You can’t be serious Harry.” Hermione almost whispered.

“I’m quite serious.” Harry said getting up to leave.

“You’re bloody barmy! Gryffindor will loose if you don’t play!” Seamus shouted from down the table.

“Don’t waste your breath Seamus, Potter doesn’t care about anyone but himself now. He’s become a selfish, arrogant, spiteful crow.” Hermione spat out furiously.

Harry clamped down and pushed his way out of the Great Hall knowing that Ginny followed him. Even though he hated Ron and Hermione now, those words still stung, and soured the good memories he had of their friendship. At the doors he sensed the elder Weasley’s and slipped into the required role. He sensed the outrage and displeasure emanating from them and assumed that they had

witnessed the entire scene. Using a bit of his magic he created a few tears that he let fall from his eyes just as he unwittingly bumped into them. Acting surprised he looked and knew his ploy had worked when their faces softened and slight smiles began to form.

Before anything further could happen he apologized in a small childish hurt voice and pressed beyond them to seek the freedom of the outdoors. When he was far enough away he burst out laughing. He had given them exactly what they had expected of him. He couldn't fathom the idiocy of people and didn't even bother to try. So caught up in their own expectations and prejudices they couldn't see how they were all destroying themselves. Their limited views only served to further the causes of infantile egomaniacs bent on world domination.

The Weasley's were appalled by the scene in front of them. They had thought that Hermione and Ron were trying desperately to win Harry back, but that's not what they heard. Dumbledore had assured them that everything was as well as could be expected between the three friends, but they never expected outright hatred towards each other. Harry looked so despondent when he had bowled right into them in his flight to escape the Great Hall. The tears that ran down his cheeks tore at Molly's heart and she swore she would do anything to protect and help the boy. She hadn't had time to hug him or even say a word before he had run off only Merlin knows where. Sharing a look with her husband she knew he felt the same.

Ginny ran after Harry trying to catch up when she spotted her parents.

"Mum, Dad? What are you doing here?" she asked feigning surprise.

"We're here to talk to the headmaster dear." Molly answered reaching out to hug her daughter. The daughter that Dumbledore had said was the only one that Harry seemed to respond to. She wasn't sure about what exactly that meant but after seeing him moments ago, she was sure that there was nothing going on. It must be the gentle caring soul that Ginny possessed that Harry responded to. Ginny was just like her mother and how proud Molly was to boast that fact. She only wanted to nurture and comfort a tortured soul and if that was what it took to help Harry than that was fine with her.

“What do you need to talk about with him? I didn’t do anything I swear!” Ginny exclaimed.

“Now, now, Ginny, it’s nothing like that,” her father consoled, “why don’t you come with us up to the headmaster’s office where we’ll discuss this.”

“Um, but what about Harry? I think he was really upset and I’m not sure I should leave him alone right now.” Ginny said ringing her hands together in indecision. The worry was evident on her face and her father took her into his embrace and kissed the top of her head.

“Don’t worry, that’s what we’re going to talk about.” Ginny feigned confusion. “Remus will gather Harry and then bring him up to the office a little later. Let’s not keep the Headmaster waiting.”

Let’s not, thought Ginny wickedly. The entire walk to the headmaster’s office she practiced her meditation techniques so she didn’t give up her act.

After an hour discussion in the headmasters office Ginny was thoroughly frustrated. Dumbledore had tried to read her thoughts again and Harry had come to her rescue again. She couldn’t wait until she was able to block people by herself. It was annoying to know that others with the proper training and skill could slip so easily into someone else’s private thoughts and memories. She knew Harry had done it and still used it occasionally but he only used it to sense truth and lies, only out of absolute necessity had he used it to actually view someone’s memories. She trusted him, even though he did some things she didn’t quite agree with, but then he was in a totally different position than she was.

She acted her part well during the meeting though. Acting flustered, a little appalled, and shy about what they were suggesting she do. Even though it was only to share a living space with Harry she knew how they expected her to react, so she gave it to them. She even threw in a few arguments against this living arrangement. In their superior wisdom and experience they rebutted and cast aside her

arguments to the amusement of both Ginny and Harry. Then it was time for Remus to bring Harry in.

Harry entered first acting the sullen and annoyed to be brought to the headmaster's office again child they thought him to be. Remus followed acting as if he was the rear guard, ready to catch the teen if he decided to bolt at a moments notice.

"Harry, my boy, Remus, please take a seat. Lemon Drop?"

Harry ignored the headmaster and slumped into the proffered seat not bothering the look up. Remus shook his head and stood besides Harry's chair.

Silence reigned until it started to become very uncomfortable. Sighing heavily Dumbledore broke the silence.

"I'm sure you are wondering my boy, why I have asked you up here?" He waited for a reply but when none came he continued onward. "It has come to our notice that you are having difficulty adjusting to normal life Harry. We are very worried about you. I am concerned that allowing you to remain alone and in a private room inaccessible to others is only contributing to your depression. As it seems the only people that you converse with are Remus and Miss Weasley we have made the decision that they will be moved into your suite. When we are done here Mr. and Mrs. Weasley, Ginny and I will accompany to your suite and we will make the appropriate renovations to accommodate you all."

Harry looked up then and Dumbledore was surprised by the mixture of emotions that graced the emerald eyes. "I see you intend to go back on your word once again headmaster."

Molly gasped at the tone Harry had used, she knew it was bad between Harry and the headmaster but she thought it had become at least a little better since school had started.

Arthur's eyebrows rose in surprise but he had to grudgingly agree with the young man that Dumbledore had in truth gone back on his



word. He had promised Harry during the summer that he would have private rooms.

"I have not violated the pledge I made to you earlier this summer Harry. If you remember correctly I held open the option to move you into the normal populace at a later date. I think this is better than placing you back into the dorms and still provides you a modicum of the privacy you so desire."

"Just like everything else you do, headmaster, you always leave yourself an out no matter how much it hurts others. No matter how much someone does it want it, you just can't keep from meddling and controlling other people's lives can you? Does Remus or Ginny even want to do this? Have you even asked them?"

"Harry, Headmaster Dumbledore and I discussed this at some length the other day. I don't want to intrude on you but at the same time I am also reluctant to leave you alone in this state of mind." Remus admitted placing a hand on Harry's shoulder. Harry flinched at the touch but didn't pull away, something Dumbledore immediately took note of.

"Harry we also agree you should not be alone right now. We have talked to the headmaster and Ginny about this. Although at first we were reluctant to allow our only daughter to live alone with you, we also see that you need someone. Ginny has been there for you when no one else has and we can see that it's going to take a while for you to trust the rest of us again." Arthur Weasley sincerely stated, as he stood up and approached Harry. Kneeling down in front of Harry he placed a hand on the armrest, afraid to offend the boy by touching him and continued, "We hope that one day that you will, but until then we want you to be able to trust someone. If Ginny is that person, than we will trust you with her." With a sigh he pressed on unsure of the response he would receive. "Harry we heard what happened in the Great Hall earlier, and we are truly sorry about that. I hope you understand that we do not think the same, and although we don't understand how exactly you feel, we do understand that what we have done to you does not deserve your forgiveness. We will do anything to help you and hope that one day you will believe that."

Harry was truly touched by the honesty and heartfelt confession of Mr. Weasley. Maybe he wouldn't have to lose everyone, maybe one day he could be close to them again. Shaking the thoughts away he refocused himself, he would think on those things later, much later. Mr. Weasley got up and went back to his seat besides his wife.

Ginny looked at Harry and shrugged her shoulders and shyly looked down at the floor. Mentally, Harry praised her acting ability.

Dumbledore, not wanting to give Harry any room to wiggle immediately stepped in and took control of the conversation again. "Now, if you will all follow me to the Gryffindor common room we will get started on the renovations to the head dorm."

"Wait a minute," Harry stood abruptly. "I might not have a choice in having to live with Remus and Ginny but there is no way I'm going to abide living with the two dunderheads that call themselves my friends. I'd rather face Voldemort again and have him cruciatus me into oblivion first."

"Harry you misunderstand me," the headmaster placated while holding up his hands to stop Harry's rant. "Miss Granger is being placed back into the seventh year girls dorm, which allows us the full use of the head suite, we will only need to place a third bedroom into the suite and you three will share a common room."

"For some reason I don't think Hermione agreed to this out of the goodness of her heart." Harry sarcastically said rolling his eyes.

"Miss Granger has had her privileges removed due to the abuse of said privileges. She remains head girl but until she has once again proven her trustworthiness she will remain in the present accommodations. I ask you not to talk about this to anyone outside this room. Miss Granger was told of her arrangements just this morning and she is a little out of sorts at the moment. It is a jolt to her pride and a very touchy subject for her, it has been hard enough for her to explain to her dorm mates why she has moved back in."

“Not likely,” Harry spat out. “She’s probably telling everyone it’s my fault and then she’ll go on spreading rumors about Ginny, Remus and I living together. How are you going to prevent that headmaster?”

“I will deal with it Mr. Potter, that is all you need worry about. Now, let us go before the crowd overcomes us.”

On their way to Gryffindor tower, their entourage picked up a couple unwanted tag-a-longs. Ron and Hermione tried to get the attention of the headmaster but failed miserably. Harry recognized the fact that the headmaster was ignoring them and seemed to be irritated by their presence. The feeling went unnoticed by everyone else and Harry wondered at it. What was the headmaster up to with those two? He would look closer into it later, right now he concentrated on the present task.

Upon entering the Gryffindor common room, a few students were startled upon seeing the headmaster and another professor but soon the whispers started and out of the corner of his eye Harry caught Hermione stiffen and straighten herself subconsciously. He gathered that news of her being kicked out of the head dorms had already made its rounds in the school.

Dumbledore spoke the password and ushered them all into the inner chambers, but when Hermione and Ron tried to follow he held them back by raising his hand. The door closed behind him and Harry could tell the two were miffed at being excluded.

After calling upon the Hogwarts House Elves, Dumbledore and the others waited impatiently for an hour while another room was added to the head dorms. Completing an inspection of the rooms everyone seemed satisfied and only after a few arguments Dumbledore set the password for the dorm so that only professors with his approval could enter.

The Weasley’s hugged their daughter and said a polite goodbye to Harry, Remus and Dumbledore before they took their leave. Dumbledore left soon after them and Harry set to work.

He explained to Remus and Ginny what he was doing while he worked. It was almost like what he had set up on his room before and at the shrieking shack with a few modifications. Though the teachers could enter the dorm, they wouldn't be able to access their true living areas. Like the Fidelius at the Shrieking Shack, no one would be allowed access without Harry's express permission. Ginny and Remus of course had that but as a precaution he added alarms to the wards he put in place alerting them to someone else's presence. He also erected wards that prevented Dumbledore from spying on him without him knowing. If the wards went off, anyone occupying the dorms would step out of the Fidelius protected rooms and into the arrangements set up by Dumbledore. It was very complicated but after testing it several times it worked.

The rest of the night they spent decorating their rooms and talking about Ginny's training. Remus, now in a better position to help, organized her schedule better than anything Hermione could come up with and made it fun at the same time.

Calling Dobby and Winky, Harry asked them if they could prepare a light dinner for them all and insisted that they both stay and join in partaking of the scrumptious feast. At first they were hesitant but when they saw that their new master, no friend, Harry was very serious they relaxed a little and enjoyed being included. They talked into the night about everything and nothing but all enjoyed themselves and reveled in the success of their first plan and the comfort of each other.

A/N: I'm sorry for not updating more quickly. Actually had this chapter written a while ago. As seems to have happened to a lot of fan fiction authors, but I never thought would happen to me, my hard drive crashed! Had to wait for a new one to be sent out—big long involved story, but I just got it and since I had saved this to my jump drive was able to finish it off. Hope you enjoy.

I also would like to let you know that, unfortunately I am going on vacation with my husband for two weeks. YEAH! I won't be posting until I get back, when I do, I hope to have a few more chapters for you. I'm not one to reveal my plans, but big events coming with more action for those of you who have been waiting for Harry to actually

use his powers. My Harry doesn't rely on just his powers! Power alone does not make one powerful, Harry has brains too and he's going to use them! Things that you all think I have forgotten from earlier chapters will come to play in the future, please be patient! Thanks for reading and all the great reviews, love them, even the ones that are not written favorably.

## Chapter 17—Knowledge and Power

The next morning was a bit strange to say the least as everyone awoke in the small suite. It took several minutes for the previous day's happenings to sink in. Harry looked over at Ginny sitting comfortably if a little nervously on the large cushioned couch by the fire and grinned sheepishly. As if feeling his eyes on her she looked up and met his brilliant gorgeous green eyes.

"Good morning Harry." She smiled.

"Morning Gin. Sleep well?" he asked rubbing the back of his neck impishly.

"Yeah, it's a great bed Harry. You did a really good job in here." Ginny looked to the floor feeling awkward and out of things to say.

"Thanks, but you'll learn soon enough. We need to get busy catching you up on training. With Remus here now it won't be as difficult as we can stop sneaking around." He sat down next to her on the couch and slouched back into the cushion appreciating the softness of his handiwork.

"Good morning you two." Remus yawned out and stretched in the doorway to his room.

"Morning Moony." Harry and Ginny said at the same time then looked at each other and smiled.

"What's going on?" Remus asked suspiciously. "Okay I think first things first; we need to set some rules." He stated seriously as he walked over and sat in a chair next to them.

"Rules? What exactly are you on about Moony? Don't you trust us?" Harry asked suppressing the smirk twitching at the corner of his lips.

"I trust you Harry....and you Ginny, but I think that in the best interest of all of us we should agree that pranking each other is off limits. Besides it wouldn't do well to think you're having too much fun and ruin the nice setup we have here."

Ginny looked up and nodded then looked to Harry waiting expectantly for his acceptance.

“Okay, you’re probably right. Now, how about some tea or breakfast? I’m kinda hungry and don’t want to go down to the Great Hall if you catch my meaning.”

Remus and Ginny nodded their agreement and Harry called out to Dobby and Winky.

“Yes Harry Potter sir, what cans Winky and Dobby do for you?

“Uh can you get us a small breakfast, nothing too big mind, and some tea and coffee for Moony?”

“Oh yes Harry Potter sir, we be getting it right away.” Winky said and with a snap of her fingers she was gone leaving Dobby behind.

Harry looked at Dobby and found he looked nervous as he stood there wringing his hands over and over. Sensing something very wrong Harry got up and knelt down besides Dobby and reached out a hand to place on the house elf’s small shoulder. Dobby squeaked in surprise at the touch and bowed his head becoming even more nervous.

“Dobby what is it, what’s wrong?” a now very concerned Harry asked.

“Harry Potter sir, Dobby has found his things but Dobby is not knowing how to tell Harry Potter sir.”

“That’s great new Dobby, just tell me. I won’t get angry with you.” He consoled the fidgeting elf.

Dobby looked up unsure, but took a deep breath and closed his eyes for a moment. “Harry Potter promises not to be angry with Dobby sir?”

Harry squelched the frustration building within him and nodded. “How could I Dobby? You’re my friend.”

This didn't seem to settle Dobby; in fact it seemed to distress the little elf further. Harry not knowing what to do sent a pleading look at Ginny. She shrugged but also got down on her knees next to Dobby.

"It's all right Dobby." She offered. "Just tell us Dobby."

Dobby turned his huge bright eyes to her then bowed his ears and squeaked out, "Headmaster has Harry Potters map sir and....." he looked up trying to gauge his company's reaction and looking for a way to punish himself.

Harry prompted him gently to go on. "Okay Dobby. Good job. Dumbledore has the Marauders map so I guess he's been using it to track me?"

"Yes Harry Potter sir, Dobby saws him using it the other day."

"Well okay Dobby," Harry said schooling his features so as not to show what he was truly feeling. "I'm glad you found it and I'm not mad at you. I'm mad at Dumbledore." He sat back down on the floor and looked pointedly at Remus before saying anything else. "Dobby have you or Winky found anything else?"

Dobby looked a little relieved but tensed up again at the question. Harry knew from this response that they had indeed found something else and felt his barriers starting to slip as his anger and frustration steadily.

"Winky sir, found your trunk sir in Professor Snapes office and....and...Dobby sees....he sees Wheezy wearing....Harry Potter's sir's cloak." He squeaked and ducked trying to launch himself at the wall. Harry grabbed him before he could act and held him secure so he wouldn't hurt himself while he breathed heavily a few moments to regain his control.

His trunk being in Snapes office was no big deal, although he was curious as to why the greasy git had it, but Ron having his cloak? Why would Ron have it? Why didn't he give it back after everything



had been revealed? Ron knew how much it meant to him, it was one of the only things he had of his fathers.

Ginny saw the fury that raged in Harry's eyes and decided now was a good time to say something. "Dobby could you and Winky please collect Harry's things and bring them back here?"

Dobby nodded excited that he wasn't in trouble and could help his friends and the Great Harry Potter again. Before he could disappear though Harry's grip on Dobby's arm tightened for a second and he spoke up barely above a whisper. "Wait! Dobby get the trunk and map but leave the cloak to me. I'll get it back on my own."

"Yes Harry Potter sir, Dobby is being right back."

As soon as Dobby left Winky appeared with several breakfast trays and drinks arranging them on the coffee table then disappeared quickly.

Silently the three roommates began eating. Dobby arrived not long after and placed Harry's trunk in his room and handed the map to Harry. Harry took it reverently and thanked Dobby before continuing to eat.

Both Ginny and Remus watched worrying about Harry's reaction to this new bit of information. He seemed to act like it was nothing important, however they knew better and waited anxiously.

"Harry?" Ginny said breaking the unbearable silence. Harry looked up emotionlessly and blinked.

"Oh sorry. I'm just thinking. Wonder how long it's going to take Dumbledore to figure out the map is missing?"

"I'm sorry Harry if I had known...."

"It's not your fault Moony. Dumbledore is too caught up in his machinations. I feel sorry for him and those that follow him blindly. Whey they all wake up and realize what's going on they won't know what him them." Harry said contemplatively. Harry's face was

expressionless but both Ginny and Remus could see the hurt within Harry's eyes.

"Oh Harry, I'm sorry too. I don't understand why Ron has your cloak or why he didn't give it back. I mean....."

"Don't you see Ginny? Dumbledore's probably asked Ron and Hermione to spy on me and most likely the two of you as well. I wouldn't be surprised if they are even participating in the Order. Anyway they won't turn against Dumbledore. Somehow he's given them exactly what they've wanted, don't know if it's power or in Hermione's case some sort of imaginary semblance of respect, but they're blinded by that. We'll get my cloak back but not yet." He finished with a sly grin forming.

"So what do you say we get started, we have a lot to accomplish." Remus interjected. "We have the weekends and evenings to work and we can't waste a single minute. Harry you still have to perfect your Phoenix form and Ginny.....well Ginny you've got a lot of catching up to do as well as myself."

Ginny looked bleary eyed from everything going on and wasn't making the transition very well. "Woooah, hold on, I'm still processing everything here. What did you say about a Phoenix form?"

"Well Harry's perfecting his animagus transformation. I think once you've caught up in some other studies, you should also start animagus training."

"Oh, but.....never mind. When do we start?"

"We're going to start today and hopefully by the end of the year you'll have progressed enough that over the summer we can start other training." Remus stated solemnly.

"It takes that long? At this rate I'll never catch up." She moped and dropped her head dejectedly.

"Hang on. I have a way to jump start us, but it will still take a lot of work on your parts." Harry said quickly feeling bad. Ginny obviously

wanted to help and would work hard, she had already with her occlumency and legilimency, but she seemed to get the impression that the road ahead would be overwhelming and in the end she couldn't do anything. "I can give you the knowledge you will need by transferring what I know, but you have to physically work at it in order to use it."

Both Ginny's and Remus' heads snapped to attention. "Why didn't you do this before Harry? It would've been a lot easier."

"No Ginny, you've come a long way in occlumency but you've had to work at it very hard by yourself. If I had just given you the knowledge without you being able to block it all from anyone trying to get into your mind, everything would be lost. Dumbledore or Snape would've been able to figure out what we were doing easily."

"I don't understand Harry. You were able to block my mind before when Dumbledore used legilimens on me."

"Well, I was only blocking a small amount of your memories that you had already organized and guarded. Your magical signature was already there; all I had to do was bolster it and then keep myself from being detected. What I have to give you both now is far too much for me to block in your mind without being noticed. Before you say anything Moony, I didn't want to show you before because I didn't want you to all of a sudden start showing more skills and knowledge than everyone who knows you is accustomed to. You still have to be able to use a little occlumency to use all of this knowledge without relying solely on your innate werewolf abilities."

"Okay so what do we need to do Harry?" Remus asked anxious at this new revelation.

"Well I have to kinda meld with your mind and copy my knowledge into you. You two have the hardest part in that you're going to have to assimilate and organize it all with your occlumency. You'll remain in a trance for at least 24 hours; this should be enough time to sort through it. You don't need to concentrate on the details, remember that when you're organizing your thoughts. While you are doing this, I

have to go to Diagon Alley to get you both a pensieve which will help later on. Things will go much faster for you this way.

Ginny sat quietly contemplating what Harry told them when a sudden thought struck her. "Harry what are you going to do if we're meditating all weekend?"

Harry looked away from Ginny's hard stare. "Like I said, I have a few errands to do besides getting the pensieves. It shouldn't take too long."

"Uh Uh Harry, you're hiding something, why won't you look at me? Give it up!"

Remus looked back and forth between the two teens. "What's up cub?"

"Well, ok, fine....." Harry said thinking of what to say, "In order to get the pensieves I have to go to Knockturn Alley." Pausing briefly he looked at the expressions on Ginny and Remus's faces and shrugged. "Don't worry; it won't be too dangerous, I'll be disguised as James and no one really knows who he is or that he's me. I have to stop at Gringotts as well to pick up something from my vault."

"There's something else, I know it, but I won't press you. Please promise you'll be careful."

"I will Moony."

"Harry why can't we go with you?"

"Ginny it'd be too obvious with you and Remus with me. We would stand out too much and being with James, someone might make a connection, it's too risky. Plus there's the fact that you'd get in trouble for leaving school grounds." Harry reasoned.

"But what about...." Remus started but stopped at the hard warning look Harry shot him. "Right well we will have a lot to do this weekend and taking time out to go to Diagon alley would only delay us. So.....let's get started."

Ginny stared hard at Harry for a while longer wishing she could read his mind. She knew there was something else going on but also knew Harry would tell her when he wanted and no sooner. "Fine, I don't like it one bit, but once this is done----no more secrets okay?"

"Once you can block your mind I agree." Harry stated relieved he didn't have to fight with Ginny over this.

Harry instructed them on what he would be doing and made sure they understood what they'd have to do the rest of the weekend. He called in Dobby and Winky to make sure they would look after the two while they were meditating and making sure that the elves would also prepare a huge feast for Sunday evening seeing as everyone would be famished by then.

Sitting in a circle on the floor, Harry made sure everyone was comfortable then led them into meditation. Four hours later Harry slowly withdrew his presence from the others satisfied with the knowledge that he had transferred. It was by no means equivalent to everything he knew but it was more than most wizards of the age. With a lot of effort on their part they would become a force to be reckoned with. Checking them over briefly Harry left to get ready to take care of business elsewhere.

Wearing his black and silver battle robes, charmed to look like everyday wizard wear, he arrived in Diagon Alley. The day was overcast and gloomy, foreshadowing the events to come, but to everyone else as long as it wasn't raining it was a good day to shop. People filled the alley going about their normal business as if there was no war going on.

Harry silently cursed the Ministry again for their failure to prepare the people but he had to admit that Minister Bones had a lot of catching up to do as well as repairing the damage that her predecessor Cornelius Fudge had caused. The ministry wasn't completely in shambles but it was close. The only hope these people had was to stand up for themselves but he knew that would never happen. He knew he would have to become what they wanted and at this point

needed if the wizarding world was to survive. He didn't like it, but he would do it and it would be done on his terms.

Shaking himself of the melancholy thought he proceeded quickly through the throng of people to Gringotts where he was immediately attended to, to the displeasure of the numerous witches and wizards still waiting in line. The unrecognized young man received attention that none present were accustomed to seeing the goblins render.

Harry knew exactly what he wanted and needed and didn't stay to linger overlong in his vault. After a brief conversation with Griphook in the goblin's private office he left to attend other business.

As dusk waned on the horizon Harry made his way down Knockturn Alley finding it as dark and sinister as it always felt, however, now it seemed as though the questionable inhabitants moved in a more timely manner as if hurrying to conclude their business. If he hadn't known better it would have seemed oddly suspicious. He had to admit that these nefarious characters knew the right of it and were better prepared to last out this war than the rest of the wizarding world who continually refused to believe that dark times were a foot. On a certain level he was glad that there would be less people about in the path of destruction that was soon to come.

A little further down he spotted his destination "Mystical Muses" and quickened his pace. Upon entering Harry recognized the magical silent alarm ward that alerted the owner of a potential customer, no other wards seemed to be in place but he kept his senses alert for any danger. As expected the proprietor came out of a back room, anxious to sell his wares.

Harry kept his gaze stern and steady on the old hunched over wizard that approached. Harry's stance radiated power as one not to be messed around with. He could sense the old man's nervousness and fear.

"How may I serve you fine sir?" the deep scratchy voice of the proprietor stated.

"I am looking for pensieves and was told you may have some. Is this true?"

The old man looked Harry over for a brief moment and nodded slightly. "It is true, but they are not cheap. A pensieve is a very valuable and rare commodity sir. I had a difficult time obtaining the ones I have."

"I am aware of their value, but I will not be cheated. I am willing to offer a fair price for 2 of them and will test them myself before purchase."

Again the old man nodded and paused a moment. "The ones I have are second hand and contain a few memories from the previous owners. For a small fee you may purchase the memories as well."

"I have no need of another's memories. They will be discarded from the pensieves that I chose before I leave this shop."

Again another nod and then the proprietor motioned for Harry to follow him into a back room. Harry surmised, looking the old man over again, that it hurt the wizard to speak. He was curious as to what could have caused this ailment but shrugged it off as well as the lack of conversation. Not too bent on spending that much time here anyway he quickly followed the man.

The back room was larger than the store front and numerous shelves crammed the space creating several isles upon which to walk through. Reaching out with his senses he picked up no additional people, but there were a fair amount of dark items that filled the shelves. At the back of the musty room the old man pointed out 5 different pensieves. Without touching them Harry scanned each to ensure there were no charms or curses placed upon them. Two of them did have a few nasty jinxes and Harry was glad he had decided upon his current course of action.

The remaining three had a few memories, but Harry wasn't interested in them, instead he looked over the runes that adorned the delicate bowls and checked the capacity of each. Finding that all three were of

quality workmanship and would be capable of handling their needs he thanked Merlin profusely.

“I will take these 3” he decided and pointed them out. “I want the memories removed, you may do with them what you wish, but I will not let them out of my sight until we have finished this purchase.”

Nodding the old man brought the 3 pensieves to a workbench and proceeded to draw the silver strands of memories out of the bowls and with a quick incantation they disappeared. It took several minutes to finish all three but Harry was satisfied after checking them once again.

“How much do I owe you?” Harry asked without pretense.

“3,000 galleons” was the gruff answer.

Harry pulled out his wallet and emptied the correct amount on the workbench and waited for a sign. A few seconds later he got it when the patron nodded. Harry brought out his wand casting several protection spells on the pensieves then shrunk them and secured them in an inner pocket of his robes.

“Good day to you sir.” Harry nodded and proceeded out of the back room through the shop and back into Knockturn Alley.

Outside the sun had set and the alley as eerily quiet. A slight breeze coursed through the close set buildings and whipped up debris. Thanks to his dragon hid boots, and the numerous charms on his clothing, Harry’s footfalls were silent upon the cobblestone walkway. As he made his way back to Diagon Alley, he reached out with his senses to assess the situation. He could still sense more people than he desired walking around the main street and surveyed the area critically.

Sensing a ripple in the magical aura of the alley he steeled himself but briskly continued walking forward. Within a split second he identified the source and sprang into action. A silver mask appeared on his face after a flick of his wrist, and the camouflage of his robes disappeared to reveal his battle robes billowing around him. An



instant later screams erupted and quickly filled the street. People ran in every direction trying to escape the mass of black robed, white masked wizards and witches that ominously gathered in front of Gringotts.

Streaks of light flew through the street chasing after those trying to escape, blasting debris into the air when missing its intended target. Within minutes of the resulting mayhem bodies lined the street amongst the debris causing others still trying to escape to trip and fall themselves. If it wasn't so deadly serious, Harry would have laughed outright at the scene. Wizards and witches who fully possessed the power to defend themselves running away without thought from the very same type of people. The Death Eaters causing havoc were no more powerful than any currently present, yet fear gave them the advantage, fear willingly given by those they targeted and killed. Harry could not tell if the bodies on the ground were dead or merely unconscious but he forced his mind away from those thoughts and continued his path. He launched himself into the fray as soon as he was close enough and took out 5 Death Eaters with stunning spells. Unaware of an opponent fighting back the Death Eaters continued on their path of destruction.

The crowd was thinning on the street now as most found shelter in stores but this didn't stop the Death Eaters, they turned their spells onto the stores attempting to wipe out those that dwelt within by destroying the buildings themselves.

Harry continued stealthily taking out Death Eaters, stunning, binding then snapping their wands until he sensed coldness seep into the alley. Immediately aware of the new threat he pulled out two vials of purple silvery liquid and sand back into the shadows. Fighting off the effect of the approaching Dementors, he furiously chanted an ancient spell while waiting for the Dementors to get closer. Upon seeing the black shrouded creatures start forward towards unconscious victims lying in the alley he pulled the stoppers on the vials.

Silvery mist swirled into the sky causing everyone to halt in their actions upon seeing it. As it touched a Dementor, the creature let out an unholy scream of terror. It faltered in its' attack as if struggling

against something pulling it back. The screams increased in volume and number as more Dementors were caught by the mist. Not able to bare the screaming, Death Eaters and innocent civilians alike clapped their hands over their ears in order to block out the sound to no avail.

Pops sounded throughout the alleyway but went unnoticed by everyone in the alley except one. Harry knew that members of the Ministry and the Order of the Phoenix were arriving. They too however were affected by the horrible sounds coming from the Dementors, and like the others in the alley tried to cover their ears. Their eyes sought out the cause of such terrible and painful screams widening in surprise as they saw the Dementors struggling against the silver mist.

As the mist reached the last Dementor and enormous CRACK exploded through the air and the silver mist began to swirl creating a tornado in the middle of the street. It grew in force and pulled the Dementors into its' center and with a blast of white light it was gone and 30 some odd black formless shrouds floated on the air currents until they lay still on the silent stones of the alley.

Those conscious in the alley stood rooted to the ground by the sight before them and Harry turned this to his advantage. Using both his wand and wandless magic he started stunning and binding the Death Eaters closest to him. The light of the spells was eventually noticed and the battle resumed. Now the Death Eaters were fighting to get away. Having seen such powerful magic that could destroy Dementors they feared for their lives. They would worry about their Lord and master later.

Order members and Aurors also unnerved by such a display of magic wondered at its source but valiantly pushed this to the back of their minds as they fought to detain the remaining Death Eaters force. Spells flew in a cacophony of colors and Harry had to abandon his place in the shadows. Running forward he flipped into the air avoiding curses flying at chest level and erecting a powerful shield that glowed faintly in the now darkened sky. Landing amidst the Death Eaters he spun in a circle casting spells as quickly as he could, which was faster than most, taking down the surprised men with each one.

Without breaking stride he turned and presented a round house kick to the face of a Death Eater trying to sneak up from behind. Needless to say, said Death Eater fell unconscious to the ground. Binding the man he quickly grabbed and snapped the wand and returned to seeking out the enemy. He saw both Aurors and Order members holding their own against the new outnumbered Death Eaters. Recognizing all of the members of the Order of the Phoenix though few if any of the Aurors he decided to help end this quicker. Just as he was lifting his wand to hex a Death Eater fighting Tonks he was thrown through the air from a spell that hit him in the shoulder from behind. Picking himself off the ground he cursed vehemently and turned to blast his attacker. A man with a stocky build and a red mop of hair swam momentarily within his vision until his mind sparked and recognition dawned. Chuckling softly to himself he watched amusedly as Charlie Weasley prepared to shoot another spell at him.

"I don't think you want to do that Charlie." He said loud enough for the other to hear.

Charlie was stunned; he didn't know the man he was trying to hex, thinking it was another Death Eater. This Death Eater was different though with his black and silver battle robes and silver mask. He had to give the guy credit for his choice in battle gear. They were obviously very expensive and well made. He recognized the Hungarian Horntail leather the robes were made of easily but couldn't figure out how this guy knew his name. Before he could contemplate further someone else had shot a spell at the stranger who surprisingly enough hit, causing the man to stagger backwards but then he disappeared.

"Charlie, you okay over there?"

"Hmmm? Oh, yeah, I'm fine Bill, you?"

"Where'd that guy go? I though Dumbledore said there were anti-apparition and portkey wards in place?"

"You're the curse breaker, why don't you tell me! Something wasn't right about that guy Bill, he knew my name and I swear I've never seen him before."

“Never seen who?” Tonks broke in coming upon the two of them.

“Oh hey Tonks,” they both chorused.

“”Who knew your name Charlie?” she asked.

“That guy I sent a reducto curse at, it should’ve knocked him out for at least 30 minutes but he got up easy enough.”

“I hit him with a bone breaking curse in the arm just before he disappeared, but it didn’t seem to faze him. Didn’t Dumbledore put up the wards?”

“As far as I know they’re still in place. Hey I wonder if that’s the same wizard that’s been fighting the Death Eaters all across the country.”

“That doesn’t explain how he knew my name! Oh shit, and we both just cursed him Bill. You don’t think he’ll come after us now do you?”

“Somehow I don’t think so. Did you get a look at his face?”

“Na, he had a silver mask covering it.”

“I think you two should talk to Dumbledore and the Order about this. If it is the same wizard, everyone will be interested to know that he was here tonight.”

“Let’s help round the rest of this scum up first.” Bill said with a look of disgust at the bound and unconscious Death Eaters around them.

Later that night, Order members crowded into the office of the Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry to discuss the events of Diagon Alley.

The greatest wizard of the age, as far as those present were concerned, was checking wards he had placed on the suite where Harry was staying. To his relief and confusion he found all three occupants within the room.

Members were curious as to why Dumbledore was watching Harry so closely, most wrote it off to his uncommon grandfatherly affection for the boy. Others thought it was because Dumbledore was scared that Harry would become the new Dark Lord even with the evidence that was presented against this. A few others thought it a little creepy and out of bounds to completely disregard someone's privacy to this extent. Tonks and Mad-eye Moody found this extremely unsettling considering the events of the past year, but kept their thoughts to themselves.

Discussion ensued about the battle: statistics were given and only 2 Death Eaters were killed, 10 were wounded, 15 captured and 3 escaped—how they didn't know; only 3 Aurors sustained slight injuries, 5 civilians were killed and 30 more injured and being treated at St. Mungos.

Kingsley Shacklebolt and Tonks reported that all interviews of witnesses had been completed which brought up the subject of the destruction of the Dementors and sightings of the mysterious wizard. No-one knew what had happened to the Dementors or even heard of anything like that being possible. This perturbed Dumbledore to no end, he briefly thought back to the Dementor display that Harry performed during his placement tests and wondered. But Harry was in the castle and had been since Dumbledore had returned himself. No other wards had been disturbed throughout the day that warned him of people coming and going to the castle. Very curious indeed. No one could give a good description of the man except for a general height and what he was wearing.

Charlie and Bill related what had happened between them and the stranger. This sent Molly Weasley into fits as she now became worried that Charlie and Bill would be targeted. Even the fact that they already were targets for being Weasley's and known members of the Order would not dissuade her from her frenzied state. Mr. Weasley finally cast a calming spell on her and took her home. Charlie and Bill both promised to fill him in on the rest of the meeting later.

Talk resumed about trying to track this powerful wizard but there was no trace of his magical signature in the Ministry nor was there any

residue left in Diagon Alley. Dumbledore of course had his suspicions about who it was but their description of the man that brought them to the Ministry during the summer could not be corroborated by others and no name had been attached to that face as of yet. Without any further information to go on they adjourned the meeting for the night. Dumbledore assured them he would contact them all again when he had further information but as for now to continue on their normal assignments.

Harry returned to his room tired and sore. The curses he was hit with were mainly blocked by his battle robes but not entirely. His back would have a nasty large bruise for awhile and his arm, although not broken, was still fractured. The arm would heal easily enough within a day with one of his potions, but he'd have to wear a sling to remind himself not to use it and make it worse during that time. For tonight, he would soak in a hot bath to relieve the rest of his aches and tomorrow he would have Remus rub in some bruise reducing cream on his back. They would not be happy upon finding out about Diagon Alley but hoped they would understand.

After checking briefly on Ginny and Remus he notified Winky and Dobby he was back. Drawing his bath he added a pain reducing, relaxation and soothing gels to it from the spickets lining the wall. This bath wasn't as big and grand as the one in the prefect's bath but it was comfortable none the less. Downing the bone setting potion for his arm he settled himself into the soothing hot water and closed his eyes sighing deeply.

Dobby and Winky continued to check on Remus and Ginny throughout the night and the next day as Harry slept late. When Harry finally awoke it was mid-afternoon. Checking his room mates he found the trance would end in a few hours so he dressed in his loose fitting black gi pants and carefully placed his left arm in the sling. Starting his kata he realized that his back was worse than he thought. Movement was painful even though he went slower through the routine; part of the problem was the fact that he wasn't using his left arm to balance the flow of movement. Concentrating on ignoring the pain he continued. So deep into repeating his routine and blocking the pain, he didn't notice that several hours had passed and Ginny and Remus were now stirring.

Remus came out of his trance first and although extremely hungry he was in awe at the knowledge that Harry had passed on to him. He felt refreshed and clear headed after sorting through all the information. Looking over to Ginny who was slowly shaking her head he recognized that she felt the same. Carefully standing up he reached over offered a hand to Ginny who looked up wide-eyed but calm and accepted the help.

“That was....I can’t....”

“I know Ginny, it’s indescribable.”

“Yeah....wow! It’s hard to believe you know?”

“Yes I do, but be grateful for it.”

“I am pro....I mean Moony but I didn’t realize the vast amount of knowledge he had.”

“He told you didn’t he? About how he learned it all?” Remus asked twitching his eyes in confusion.

“Yes, but, well I guess it makes perfect sense but it never really sunk in I guess. This just makes it all more real. I....hey where is Harry by the way?”

“I’m not sure. Dobby?”

Dobby popped into the room excited at seeing his friends awake again. “Oh Dobby is glad you’s is awake sir. You must be hungry; Dobby will get Winky and bring dinner right away.”

“Hang on Dobby, do you know where Harry is?” Ginny asked before the elf could disappear.

“Oh Harry sir is in the training room Miss Wheezy.”

Before completing the sentence Dobby was gone leaving a chuckling Remus and Ginny behind. They walked into the training room to find Harry in the middle of his kata dressed only in his black pants.

Ginny held her breath and drank in the view. She loved it when Harry practiced like this. Her heart fluttered at the sight before her, he was such a fine looking young man. His graceful movements belied his strong countenance, determination and the harsh exterior he showed the world outside these rooms. She understood his gentleness and caring attitude as well as his staunch loyalty to those he loved and who loved him back and was grateful to be among that. The fact that he was finely chiseled and absolutely handsome with his dark hair and green eyes had absolutely nothing to do with. 'Yeah right!' she scolded herself. She longed to run her hands over his strong muscled chest and arms, to have his lips on hers again, to feel the hardness of his back.....WHAT! Ginny squinted her eyes and looked closer at the figure before her still moving about not noticing them.

Once of his arms was strapped to his chest by a sling and his back was darkened as if he had just been rolling around in a mud puddle. But that wasn't mud! Ginny stalked closer with Remus closely behind her. She could tell that Remus saw the same thing she did.

"HARRY JAMES POTTER, JUST WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN UP TO!" she shouted thoroughly shocking the hell out of young man before her. He stumbled a bit and regained his composure before turning around to meet a beat red Ginny and a furious Remus.

"Hey guys. How'd everything go?" he asked trying to change the subject while still regaining his bearings.

"Harry don't try to change the subject." Remus spoke harshly, adequately relating to Harry exactly how mad Remus was.

"Look, something happened while I was in Diagon Alley and I got hit by a couple curses when I let my guard down. I'm fine really."

"Don't you lie to me Harry, you knew something was going to happen and you purposely put yourself in danger. How could you lie to us like that?"



“Ginny please, I can explain if you both will calm down.” He jumped forward and grabbed Ginny’s arm as she turned to walk out on him. “No, Ginny, we’re not going to play this game. I will tell you what happened and you’re going to listen. If you’re still angry with me afterwards, well then we’ll deal with it. You too Remus. I think we should go in the other room where Dobby and Winky have set out some food for us.”

Remus nodded and stalked off. Ginny yanked her arm out of Harry’s grasp, growled at him then followed Remus. Harry sighed and ran his hand over his scruffy head thinking about how hard this was going to be. He followed them shortly afterward and sat down across from them.

“Okay look, obviously you’re not going to eat until I tell you, so I’ll get on with it. Yes, I did know that something was going to happen yesterday and that’s why I had to go. Dumbledore won’t listen to me anymore because he doesn’t believe that I could possibly tell the difference between a real or false vision from Voldemort. Add to that, my time in Azkaban doesn’t really speak much for my sanity you know?”

“We could’ve helped you Harry.” Ginny spoke up angrily.

“No you couldn’t and you both know why. That will change in time, but yesterday I had to act alone. I didn’t lie to you outright; I did exactly what I told you I was doing. I went to Gringotts then went to Knockturn Alley to get the pensieves. I failed to tell you about the impending attack and you didn’t ask so it wasn’t really lying. I know it’s pointless to argue about that but I saved lives last night. The Ministry and the Order didn’t show up until halfway through the attack. If I hadn’t have gone there would be a lot more casualties than there were. It actually turned out pretty good considering.”

“What happened to you then? How’d you get hurt?” Moony asked. His anger was only slightly abated, it was mainly concern for his young cub that caused the anger.

“Well, it was actually kinda funny really.”

"How could it be funny?" Ginny shouted in exasperation. "You get hurt and it's funny, are you completely mad?"

"Gin, please. It's who was able to get a hit on me that was funny, at least to me, they still don't know." Seeing their confusion and frustration he quickly stopped laughing and sobered up. "Look I was disarming a Death Eater when someone hit me from behind with a Reducto curse. I was surprised because at the time there were no other Death Eaters around me. When I turned around I found it wasn't a Death Eater but an Order member that got me."

"Who was it then?" Remus asked dangerously. Harry saw that he was planning out what exactly he would do to the Order member once he found out who it was.

"It was actually two people."

"Two?"

"Yeah Gin, both with the same red hair that happens to adorn your head." Harry stifled a chuckle and waited for them to understand what he was saying.

Ginny seemed to get it first and her eyes widened then narrowed in anger. "Which one of my idiotic brothers had the gall to curse you?"

"It must have been Bill or Charlie" Remus stated matter-of-factly.

"Actually it was both. Charlie got me with the Reducto and while I was busy with him, Bill got me from the side with a bone breaking curse. My robes were able to block the worst of it but I still got hurt, as you can see. My arm will be healed by tomorrow morning and my back. Well I need a little help with that. I was hoping that I could get your help with that as I can't really rub the salve into my own back."

No response was heard. Instead Ginny got up quietly from her chair and moved around to Harry's side. Not really sure what to expect Harry braced himself for Ginny's attack whether it be physical or verbal. What he got shocked him even more. She gently reached out

and took his hand in her own and tugged him up out of his seat. As she was leading him into the other room she looked over her shoulder ignoring the shocked Harry following obediently and spoke to Remus.

“You go ahead and eat Moony, we’ll be back after I take care of Harry.”

A/N: Okay, I know you all are mad at me for not updating sooner so I broke down from my outlining and finished this chapter. I've been trying to outline the rest of the chapters of my story so it would be easier to complete and faster to post for those of you who enjoy my story. I really do appreciate the reviews that you write. I'm not as good as others in responding to them, but I have taken into consideration a lot of your criticisms and corrective advice. As soon as I finish the story I will go back and make a few corrections in previous chapters, which are really quite minor and won't affect the story. Hope you like this chapter.

Meurysan

## Chapter 18 Serious Consequences

That night Harry lay in bed recounting a pleasurable evening. Instead of a furious fire breathing Ginny, he was treated to a quiet and caring discussion while Ginny expertly massaged his back with the bruise reducing ointment. Ginny let go of her doubt and anxiety telling Harry exactly how she felt and how she hoped he felt the same way. At first Harry couldn't think, not because he didn't feel the same but because her ministrations were making it very difficult for him to concentrate.

Her welcomed touch broke off and Harry could feel her disappointment. His mind snapped back into focus and he slowly turned over and sat up reaching for her hands. Gently holding them he caressed the back of them with his thumbs and explained how he felt the same way but didn't want to rush her. They sat in front of the fire burning brightly in the hearth for several silent minutes. Slowly, almost as if afraid, Harry reached up and cupped his hand around her face and leaned forward. He was greatly relieved when Ginny met him halfway and their lips met in a gentle chaste kiss.

Remus wondering what was taking so long cautiously entered the common room. Not surprised by what he found and relieved that it wasn't going too far, he quietly exited and finished his dinner before warning Dobby and Winky not to bother the two love birds. He was extremely happy for Harry and Ginny to have finally found each other.

Thinking of his own life, he was surprised to find that he didn't immediately scoff at the idea of having a future. Maybe he would be able to find someone special to share his life with. It didn't seem to matter that the current ministry outlawed this for Lycanthropes but the future ministry; well they would have to wait and see. Even though England was prejudiced many other countries weren't and there wasn't any concrete evidence that a Lycanthrope would pass down his curse to any offspring. No, maybe his attempts to thwart his own love life with a particular spunky Auror were indeed misplaced. Maybe he would have to test the waters with said Auror soon to see if there was anything there. He slept very well that night and found he was only slightly anxious about what would happen when classes resumed tomorrow.

As usual, Harry was up early the next day performing his workout, but this time both Ginny and Remus were participating as well. Harry led the exercises before they set off on a 5 kilometer run around the lake. Neither Ginny nor Remus had ever really been into physical fitness before so it hit them harder than Harry who laughingly egged them on infuriating them. They longed for a way to get back at him for this torture but after what he had already done for them and the fact that they all promised not to prank each other they backed off and continued grudgingly.

“You know it will only get easier the more you do this. In time you won’t even feel it, you’ll actually miss it when you don’t get a chance to workout.”

“Yeah right Harry, whatever you say” Ginny whined out of breath. Remus just glared.

After finishing they all trudged back up to their suite and got ready for breakfast. Down in the Great Hall Remus went to his customary position at the head table while Ginny and Harry sat in their regular place at Gryffindor table away from everyone else. A few minutes later Neville joined them silently and the three sat enjoying each others company. It wasn’t long after that the Great Hall came alive with noise as students arrived to begin their day. Harry was grateful that he didn’t have to deal with the horror twins this morning as he was still devising his plan to make Ron and Hermione pay for their indiscretions.

A great roar resounded throughout the hall as hundreds of owls burst into the room delivering the morning post which happened to include the morning edition of the Daily Prophet. Paying for his copy he read through it quickly gaining the important information he needed then passed it on to Ginny who read it at a slower pace. As he watched her reading the paper he could tell by the look on her face that he would have some questions to answer later on that day. Instead of a biting remark which would ruin their deception, she raised an eyebrow in question.

“Later” he replied then glanced up to the head table to see Remus with a similar expression on his face. Nodding he looked over to see

the reaction the other professors and Dumbledore would have to the story.

Dumbledore was looking back at Harry with a worried and calculating stare but was distracted by Professor McGonagall leaning over to ask a question.

Blocking out everything else Harry watched his ex-best friends closely. They seemed just as shocked as everyone else about the battle at Diagon Alley. He saw the nervous look they sent the headmaster then their eyes locked with his. Harry maintained his emotionless expression and continued to stare them down. He could feel their nervousness escalate and fear begin to take over until they finally dropped their eye contact. Ron released an obvious nervous laugh in response to something Dean Thomas asked him and glanced quickly again at Harry before turning to Hermione, gathering their things and leaving for their first class.

"Well, well, well, looks like someone's been replaced as the hero." The smug voice of Draco Malfoy sneered from behind.

Harry finished swallowing his food before answering; he could feel the anger of the blonde Slytherin increasing the longer he waited to answer. "As long as he's fighting against masochistic lunatics he's alright in my book." Harry replied without turning around. Without looking he could feel that all eyes were on their little group and he could hear the whispers that raced through the hall relating to the others what was being said.

"We'll see about that Potter when the Dark Lord finally captures him and shows everyone how foolish it is to defy him. Then maybe you'll learn proper respect in how to treat a Malfoy."

"And how is that exactly? People earn respect it's not given freely. Take your father for example; he is not respected only feared because he is a Death Eater." Harry said casually.

"Hah! My father is a great wizard and a petty pathetic half-blood like you has no chance against him."

“Is that why he was in Azkaban prison a year ago?”

“He was freed on all counts; he was framed by dimwitted ministry officials that chose to believe your lies.”

“Like the lies that said that Voldemort was back? Tell me Draco, how is it you can defend such a monster yet flinch at his very name? I don’t see you flinching at the name of your ‘father’ who is supposedly a great wizard. Maybe he’s not so important. Besides last I heard your father has not been seen since the summer. Could it be he’s afraid and in hiding or maybe the ministry finally realizes he is a servant of Voldemort and has given him the kiss?”

“How dare you insult me, you’re nothing Potter! You’re just upset that you’re no longer in the spotlight. Afraid no-one’s going to like you anymore Potter? Afraid that they’ll all realize what a mistake you are and leave you on your own. Then we’ll see how effective you are.”

Standing up Harry turned around and snarled right in Draco’s face ignoring the wand pointed at his chest. Draco was too much of a coward to use it in front of the entire student body and the professors. “I’m not afraid of your feeble attempts in trying to humiliate me for I’ve already lived it! As for your Lord and Master, I’ve fought him more than any other witch or wizard alive and am still standing before you. As for your father, I’d think twice about what you think he is or is not. Choose your side wisely Malfoy before you loose all in the end.”

“My father has proven himself satisfactorily to our Lord. I’ve even received a letter from him Potter. You can’t scare me; I know which side to choose.”

Harry laughed outright in the Slytherin’s face causing the shock factor to increase dramatically around the hall. Not everything they said to each other could be heard even by those students close enough to the school rivals. Neville and Ginny heard it but remained stoically silent frustrating the efforts of those near.

“At least you’ve been warned.” Harry stated as he picked up his school bag and left the hall, noticing as he did that the noise level increased the closer he got to the doors.

Malfoy stood fuming, as once again Potter was able to turn the tables. He was furious at the egotistical Gryffindor and swore he would be the one to put him in his place. Even though his father wrote saying to leave the Potter brat alone, that the Dark Lord wanted the honor of killing the boy himself, there were other ways to get at Pot-head. It would take planning and more information than he had as yet but he would get Potter. His way of doing things wouldn't really go against the Dark Lords plans and if he succeeded he could take full credit and receive the glory due him from the Dark Lord himself. Maybe he would even be honored with promotion into the inner circle of the Death Eaters, trusted explicitly above all others. Yes, he would show the world not to mess with a Malfoy; his father wouldn't even have to know what he was planning.

Satisfied with himself Draco stalked back over to his seat at the Slytherin table and resumed his breakfast, not noticing the calculating glare his head of house was sending him.

Although Snape could not hear exactly what was going on he was able to use his skills at Legilimency to break into his Slytherin Prince's head to get the gist of the conversation. Potter somehow had advanced beyond his ability to penetrate the golden boys mind. It infuriated him that he no longer had access to Potter and further that he was directed to stay as far away from the boy as possible. This order did not come from the headmaster but from the Board of Governors for the School. He would exact revenge on Potter for the humiliation of being placed on probationary status as a professor so that the new board could review his conduct. If he didn't perform to their standards he would loose his job. That alone didn't bother him, it was the other not so evident reasons that the school provided him that would be sorely missed and not by just himself. There was much more to lose than just his job and Potter was the cause of it, he would pay dearly for it despite Dumbledore's pathetic protection of the boy.

It sickened him the way the Headmaster catered to that spoiled brat. So what if he had been accused wrongly and sent to Azkaban for a time. Life was not fair and the golden boy needed to learn that the hard way. Besides he was sure it was the only bad thing in the boy's life, being raised as a spoiled arrogant brat. Not like his own



Slytherins whom he protected against all others, theirs was a hard life that none could understand except those in like situations, and those in like situations were all in Slytherin House.

Eyeing Draco as he returned to his seat he thought about his Godson's life. Although Malfoys had money, and Draco had the best of all things he did not have everything in life and Snape understood this and protected Draco as if his own. Something in Draco's mind caught his attention and he tried to delve deeper to get a better impression but it was lost as the Slytherin interacted with his house mates. This was not good, Draco was planning something and it was something that went against the wishes of the Dark Lord and Malfoy Senior, if he didn't interfere and stop him it would turn out badly for them all. Maybe if he talked to Malfoy Senior.

Shaking his thoughts of Draco he focused on the curious reappearance of the older Malfoy. It was bothersome not knowing where the man had been but after a private meeting with the Dark Lord, Lucius was punished severely in front of the other Death Eaters but welcomed back into the fold. The Dark Lord made it clear that no-one was to question Lucius on his whereabouts and to keep their distance from him as he had been assigned a very special mission that only he and the Dark Lord would know about. No amount of trickery would be able to pry the secret out of them without discovery so Snape had nothing to report to Dumbledore and the Order other than the fact that Lucius Malfoy was back and appeared none-the-worse for wear. He was sure Lucius had contacted Draco, but as always, their letters were charmed so that only those of Malfoy blood could read the stupid things.

A bell rang throughout the school bringing Snape out of his thoughts and back to the fact that he had a class full of ignorant, irritating young teenagers that he had to coddle if he wanted to keep his position. His mood sour he strode purposefully out of the Great Hall and down to the dungeons.

Classes the rest of the day were normal and boring for Harry as he did what was asked of him and only what was asked. During the remaining time in each class period he finished the homework set by his professors so that he would have more time to train. Tonight

would be very important in starting both Ginny and Remus off to a good start. Knowing they were excited about everything that happened over the weekend, he laughed silently at their reactions to learn more of what he had planned and their participation in it.

Although he knew he had deep feelings for Ginny, feelings he would like to cement, he knew he couldn't keep her out of the fight. So his next best option was to make sure she was ready to fight and was better at it than anyone else, well at least anyone but him. Remus fell into the same category as he was the only one left that he felt a kinship bonding to. Remus had stood by him throughout everything and provided a voice of reason when there was no one else around. Ginny had proven herself and provided something completely different that was very appealing. Both would be ready to fight and survive before he would put them in harms way and both would play important roles in the upcoming battles. Temerity had lost and been replaced by a boldness he was slowly becoming used to but cautioned himself not to become too rash in his deliberations, Ginny and Remus would help him in this regard, a so-called 'sounding block' to ensure his reason wasn't false.

Skippping dinner Harry made straight for their suite and sent a silent message for both Remus and Ginny to join him as soon as possible for they had a lot to do. They arrived shortly after without much trouble since most people expected that they wouldn't be staying in the Great Hall for dinner if Harry wasn't there. Harry took them through more training and after a nice meal provided by Dobby and Winky; they sat down in front of the fireplace and planned into the night. Their first objective, although it had nothing to do with the war effort, would be a campaign against the 'Corrupted Duo' as they aptly named Hermione and Ron now. The first attack would come tomorrow night.

As Tuesday rolled around nothing out of the ordinary happened and the school populous breathed a deep sigh of relief. Draco was silent, Potter was silent, Hermione and Ron were silent, the Headmaster and the other Professors were silent. It was almost too good to be true, but no one wanted to say anything just in case that would jinx it. The only thing remotely interesting and it was a stretch to call it that

was Potter receiving a pitch black envelope during lunch which the headmaster eyed curiously.

Upon receiving the letter Harry silently read it then burned it, as he did with all recently received post. It became a new practice to ensure his privacy, as he memorized the letters and no one could get it from his head. No one could get any information from ashes either and that was why he did it. He didn't put it past the headmaster or some former friends to try and piece together bits and pieces of letters he tore up or threw out. Heck they were stealing things from him right and left and didn't even bat an eye at it, and they thought he was the one with problems!

Finishing he set off for his lesson with his most revered headmaster. The lesson went pretty much as he expected it to. Before starting on what little knowledge the headmaster was willing to impart, he questioned Harry on the letter he had received. Harry said it was regarding his finances at Gringotts which the headmaster had no business in. Of course Dumbledore didn't like this and tried using Legilimency, the man just never learned!

Dumbledore felt the same feeling of disorientation he usually felt upon entering Harry's mind and saw himself approaching one of the boy's lavatories. The door opened and he could see the cavernous room lined with stalls, sinks and urinals. Approaching a urinal he looked down and was quite embarrassed and quickly withdrew from the boys mind. He didn't understand why he kept seeing things in first person each time he saw a memory of Harry's. It was quite strange as it was so unlike entering anyone else's mind where he would see in third person, where he would see all parties involved including the individual whose mind he was reading. He would have to conduct more research into why this was happening but for now he would have to continue the lesson and try to make Harry slip up and reveal what the headmaster wanted to know most. He knew the boy had power but so far was very careful in only revealing the minutest details.

They concentrated on potions again and Dumbledore tried to question Harry once again about the Dementor potion he used during his testing over the summer. Harry avoided the question and

continued on with the instructions Dumbledore had set for his assignment and was more than relieved when the two hour period was finished.

Harry and Ginny waited in a darkened corner of the Gryffindor common room for Ron and Hermione to come down for their prefect rounds. It was a good thing that it was the midnight shift they were working. The darkened hallways would work against them this night and they would taste a little of their own medicine. Through some casually revealed information, Ginny had learned how vicious Ron and Hermione were in catching students out of bounds during their first hour of patrol. During the remaining two hours they took advantage of the empty hiding spots. This was one of the many reasons the turnout of students for the DA had been diminishing.

This year was no different; in fact it was even worse. No student out for a romantic midnight rendezvous was safe and with only three weeks into the term they had set the tone. Since Ron and Hermione were an item they took full advantage of the perks associated with being head girl and a seventh year prefect. No amount of complaining from the other prefects or even the head boy had any effect on Professor McGonagall or the headmaster which caused resentment among not only the prefects but among the student body. It was blatantly obvious that the two were entrenched in their positions. Tonight would be the first of many which would dislodge them.

While they waited Harry could only wonder about how low his former friends had sunk. Before Azkaban he never would have suspected such actions from his friends. Although now, he had to admit the signs were there and he just chose to ignore them.

Hermione had always been a know-it-all, spouting the knowledge she gained verbatim from books whether you wanted the answers or not. She reveled in always being right and was quite upset when outdone in classes. She never handled being wrong gracefully, in fact she never admitted to ever being wrong. No one had ever forced her to face the fact that some things you just can't learn from books. Harry mentally laughed at the thought that even her little rendezvous with Ron were probably taken from some book on the proper technique for kissing or other more intimate actions. That thought only served to

make him sick so he returned to his previous thinking. Hermione's other weakness was her never flinching faith in authority figures even when those authority figures were false, case in point Professor Lockhart in their second year. She also never questioned the reasons behind the decisions of authority figures either. It was a wonder she could think for herself. SPEW was a good venue for her to find herself but she didn't conduct quite enough research and only went off half cocked when complimented by the headmaster in her endeavors. Hermione had been easily maneuvered into position by the headmaster so he could do no wrong. It was sad really, she fell into the same category as most of the Order members when it came to serving the headmaster, they served without question or thought believing the headmaster was someone immune to the most basic human traits.

Ron was another thing altogether. He had seen the jealousy that consumed Ron more than once throughout their friendship but had thought it was normal considering the circumstances. How wrong he was. Ron was never happy with anything he had, very much like his cousin Dudley Dursley used to be. Yes, he would admit that being the sixth son made it difficult to cut your own path, but not impossible. Ron wanted what others had but wasn't willing to work for it, he wanted it handed to him on a silver platter the way he thought everyone else got it. Granted, it was very childish to think that way but once again Ron was not forced to face life and therefore to grow up. Even Percy, whose ambition got him killed in the end, worked hard for what he wanted. He gave up family and friends to get what he wanted and spent endless hours following on the heels of Fudge in order to advance, it failed, but he had worked for it. The Twins were the same way; they gave up school to plough forward in their dream to open their own joke shop and currently spent many hours in creating new and outrageous gags for the public. Ron had fallen to using his position against others, using fear and intimidation, the typical vices of most Death Eaters. One would think with the money they had stolen last year that he would have been happy, but that wasn't enough he constantly wanted more.

Sighing he felt a comforting warmth on his arm and looked into the concerned eyes of one of the most important people in his life. Ginny smiled encouragingly and he felt better. Smiling back he leaned over

and kissed her softly on her sensuous lips and was about to deepen the kiss when she pulled away quickly and pointed behind him. Turning he saw what they had been waiting for and held his breath while making sure their disillusionment charm was still working.

Ron and Hermione met with a kiss in front of the fire then walking hand in hand left the common room. Harry quickly pulled out the Marauders Map and activated it. Watching for a few minutes to give themselves a safe distance Ginny and Harry watched the corrupted duo head down towards the first floor. After deciding that they had waited long enough they finally made their move.

As they had heard, Ron and Hermione spent the first hour scouring the castle to clear out any students then proceeded to get cozy in one of the many broom closets.

"You would think with the access they have, they could find something a little more romantic than a musty old broom cupboard." Ginny said disgusted.

"Well Ron's not much for thinking things out, too much a slave to primal motivations. Hermione, well you would think she could find better information in one of her many books but maybe she just hasn't read the right one yet." Harry laughed. Ginny slapped him playfully on the arm and laughed with him.

"You know, you've got them pegged. Do you really think they've figured out what to do with each other?"

"That's a vision I do not need planted in my head thanks. Ugh! Why'd you have to say that? Now it's stuck there and I'm going to have to spend more time tonight meditating to get rid of it."

"Don't worry about it; I know just the thing that will get your mind of them. Let's find Filch!"

Half an hour after Ron and Hermione had entered the broom closet it opened with a bang and the couple was rudely yanked apart.

"What is the meaning of this, you can't...."

"Hmmm, thought better of the Head Girl. I've already contacted Professor McGonagall that students were out of bounds, should be here shortly."

"We are not out of bounds Filch; we were checking the closet because we heard something..."

"Miss Granger, Mr. Weasley, what is the meaning of this? You're supposed to be on the 3rd floor tonight."

"Professor, we heard something and were checking it out when Filch rudely yanked us out." Ron tried.

"The fact that the two o' ya were glued together at the lips with yer arms round each other indicated otherwise."

"That's not true you're lying!" Hermione screeched and stomped her foot.

"That's enough Miss Granger, where's your school robe?" McGonagall asked with pursed lips and a raised eyebrow. It was clear that she did not believe their story.

"Well um, it got...caught on something when Filch pulled us out and..."

"Would this be it then?" Filch said picking up the said robe from the floor.

"It would seem Miss Granger and Mr. Weasley that the punishments that you have served for previous abuses of your positions have done nothing for you. I will be talking to the headmaster tonight about this and your inability to fulfill your duties as head girl. You Mr. Weasley are no longer a prefect, hand over your badge. Both of you will report to my office tomorrow at 5. Do you understand?"

Both Ron and Hermione looked like they wanted to protest but McGonagall's raised hand stopped them. Ron reluctantly handed

over his prefect badge and after being dismissed they headed back to the Gryffindor tower.

As soon as everyone was gone Harry and Ginny burst out laughing. It had worked even better than they had planned but it wouldn't end their campaign, now it would be in honor of all the students that had put up with the Corrupted Duo for the last year lording over everyone.

The next day was glorious, even though outside they maintained the deception, inside Ginny and Harry were anxious to see first hand the results of last night's mission. They were not disappointed when during breakfast the story had already made the rounds and Neville came by to fill them in. Even Draco Malfoy was smirking and pointing out the disgraced couple. Chancing a glance to the head table he found that the professors were just as informed as the student body and from the look on Dumbledore's face he had had a very rough night talking to Professor McGonagall.

Sure enough later that night it was announced that Hermione Granger was no longer Head Girl and was being replaced by Susan Bones. Neville Longbottom actually replaced Ron who made it known to all what a joke Neville was. Surprisingly Neville stepped into the role of prefect quite well and issued Ron two nights detention with Filch without taking any house points, McGonagall backed him up. Ron was speechless and sat heavily on his bench for the rest of dinner until a solitary hyperactive owl raced into the hall swooping towards the Gryffindor table. Without stopping it dropped its red package and raced out as if knowing what was to come.

"RONALD BILIUS WEASLEY! I AM SO ASHAMED OF YOU! OBVIOUSLY THE DETENTIONS YOU SERVED FOR YOUR DISPICABLE BEHAVIOR HAVEN'T BROKEN THROUGH THAT THICK SKULL OF YOURS. NOW YOU'VE GONE TOO FAR AND HAVE DISGRACED THE FAMILY BY BEING REMOVED AS A PREFECT! YOU'VE LET TOO MUCH GO TO YOUR HEAD! IF YOU DON'T CHANGE YOUR ATTITUDE YOUNG MAN YOU'LL WIND UP JUST LIKE YOUR BROTHER PERCY!(Several sobs included here) YOUR DISGUSTING DISPLAY AND DISREGARD FOR RULES IS UNACCEPTABLE. YOUR FATHER AND I HAVE DECIDED THAT FROM NOW ON YOUR ALLOWANCE IS CUT OFF UNTIL YOU



DISPLAY SOME HUMILITY. I KNOW YOU'RE OF AGE YOUNG MAN BUT THERE ARE DIRE CONSEQUENCES FOR YOUR ACTIONS IF YOU REMAIN ON THIS PATH. I EXPECT BETTER OF YOU AND HERMIONE! I AM VERY DISAPPOINTED IN YOU BOTH!"

With that the letter tore itself into pieces leaving behind one thoroughly embarrassed Ron Weasley and a humiliated Hermione Granger. Both were beat red and had their heads ducked as low as possible trying to avoid the stares they were receiving. When the hall erupted in laughter they quickly excused themselves and ran from the Great Hall. Hermione covering her face and the obvious tears that streaked down it.

Harry and Ginny although not laughing were satisfied with the results of last nights mission and continued to eat in silence.

The rest of the week flew by while Remus, Ginny and Harry concentrated on training and setting up their plans. They left the corrupted duo alone for a while; they had more important things to deal with now. Harry would be leaving to go to the Wizengamot meeting on Saturday as James Roper. This would be a big step in deciding what to do next. Although Harry wouldn't give details about the plan, both Ginny and Remus could tell it was important that the Wizengamot agree to the proposal the Goblins had written.

Their training was going along smoothly. Ginny's occlumency was good enough to resist Snape but not quite up to par with Dumbledore but she was getting there. All it took was practice, but until she could resist the headmaster she was still a danger.

Ginny wanted to go with Harry to the Wizengamot but knew she wouldn't be able to. Harry had promised her that he wouldn't keep her from being involved once she was ready and she was working hard to get there. She was advancing quicker in her studies than she had ever done before and the professors noticed this as well as the students. Most took it to be spending so much time without much to do since she was staying with a very moody and temperamental Harry Potter. The fact that Remus Lupin was also there to help

caused a little jealousy. Ginny ignored it all and worked diligently in class and out.

Even with all this going on her and Harry still found time to be a couple. Whether it was sitting in front of the fireplace holding each other while discussing training or just holding hands as they walked out to the grounds for their morning workouts they took what they could get and were happy for it.

Remus was ecstatic at the knowledge he had gained and was willing to do anything for it. Well almost anything, he was eternally grateful to Harry who had made it all possible. In his wildest dreams he had never imagined the things he knew now, he had to work hard in order to use this new knowledge but he felt like a kid in a candy store. His body was filled with a cleansing energy and eagerness to help his cub fulfill his plans then he could help him fulfill his dreams. A new life was ahead of them and he was glad for it. Right now he would play his part until he could more actively be involved. Worry for Harry and the Wizengamot meeting constantly played in his mind but somehow he knew that it would work out.

Saturday arrived and although Harry was confident in his plan he still felt a little nervous. He could also feel the worry coming from Ginny and Remus but knew they wouldn't say anything more. After kissing Ginny and hugging Remus he disappeared to perform his role.

Arriving at the Ministry Harry made sure his disguise as James Roper was in place and then cast an invisibility charm on himself as he strode purposefully through the halls. Although not many people were aware of whom James Roper was, it wouldn't do to have Dumbledore alerted to the presence of James Roper before he got halfway to the meeting hall. Through his senses he could ascertain that everyone was present waiting anxiously for the Goblin Ambassador. Taking a deep breath he pushed open the double doors and walked quickly to the front of the room. As he eyed the members seated on their raised platform he had to stifle a chuckle. What was it with everyone in positions of power having to be seated above everyone else? Did they not think that others realized who they were or was it some deep rooted insecurity? Whatever, time to get things moving before they have a chance to say anything.

“Good morning honored members of the Wizengamot, I am honored that you have decided to call this meeting in order to hear the proposal of the Goblin Nation. I am James Roper duly appointed ambassador to the Goblin High Council. With the permission of said council I have the proposal fully documented for your review. Please take however long you require. I have been instructed to wait for your answer.” Harry approached the bench and laid down the scroll then stepped back to wait.

Dumbledore stood up and Harry inwardly groaned, he knew the headmaster would make this more difficult than it had to be, but one could always hope couldn't they? “Mr. Roper, it has come to our attention that you have been involved in certain activities that leave us to question your true loyalties. Before the Wizengamot considers this document we would like for you to answer a few questions.” Dumbledore stated without removing his gaze from James.

Harry could tell by the looks on the other members faces that Dumbledore's actions had not been expected and some looked absolutely enraged by it. Feeling the touch of someone performing Legilimency angered Harry as he knew exactly who it was. Did the man truly believe that no one was entitled to their own privacy? Or maybe he thought he wouldn't be caught.

“Professor Albus Dumbledore, headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry I presume?” Harry stated with a slight bow of his head.

“Yes, that is who I am.”

“Will you please allow me the courtesy due any ambassador and abstain from using your Legilimency skills against me? If I am not misinformed your government only allows the use of Legilimency on others in situations of extreme nature, those being criminal trials, after first obtaining the consent of the defendant and their legal council. In accordance with rule 12997 established in 1566 under no circumstance is the use of Legilimency to be used without due consent against any government official acting in official capacity to that government which they serve.”

The Wizengamot was duly shocked by this revelation, some sent death glares towards Dumbledore who chose to ignore it while others were more impressed with the knowledge this ambassador had of the laws.

“To which government do you claim to be acting in official capacity to? I see before me a wizard, who falls under the wizarding government. In the history of the goblin culture there has never been a human representative.” Dumbledore stated smugly.

“In all your great wisdom headmaster you are quite wrong. I see by the looks on your faces that you do not believe me. That is the fault of past wizard and witches who deemed it inappropriate to write the truth in history books and yours in believing everything that you have ever read without question. Needless to say, in the year 1056 there was a wizard that stood for the goblins and now I stand before you in the same capacity. All is outlined within the document before you, if you will please read it and then we can start the discussion.”

“I am afraid we cannot do that Mr. Roper, for you have yet to answer our questions.” Dumbledore pressed.

Knowing that nothing would be solved by resisting Harry conceded. “I will answer what I can. What is your question?”

“Whom do you serve?” Dumbledore immediately questioned.

“I am here to represent the Goblin Nation in a matter of historical significance. It is outlined in the document you have before you.”

”That’s not what I asked.”

”Dumbledore this is ridiculous,” one of the members stated, “that is exactly what you asked. Now lets get this moving, we don’t have all day to waste.”

“Please Humphries; this is a matter of great importance.”

"I don't see what is so important, it states right here that this man is has official approval to present and discuss this proposal with the Wizengamot." A regally attired woman stated, obviously also frustrated with the wrangling of Albus Dumbledore.

"Please Lady Elaine, I do not believe that the young man is who he says he is and this may be a trap set up by Lord Voldemort."

Harry was enraged at Dumbledore. How dare he stall these proceedings for his own personal games! Now he could see why Fudge and others were so adamant about removing the authority of Dumbledore from the Ministry. Dumbledore had his uses, just like everyone else, but this was just going over the edge.

"I am sorry to hear you say that Headmaster Dumbledore, for I do not serve the Dark Lord. I never have and never will. I have vowed to do what is right and to protect that which is in danger of being destroyed. I am the ambassador to the High Goblin Council as it states before you and if you checked you would see that those runes cannot be forged for there are no others on this plane that can create them." Harry was finding it very difficult to maintain a neutral attitude in the face of this blatant disregard.

"Than why has your name been associated with the mysterious wizard that we have been reading about in the Daily Prophet recently?" Dumbledore queried angrily.

"I was not aware that my name was given to the wizard that has been saving the people against the terror of the Dark Lords forces. I do not put much faith in articles written and censured by the government. I thought you were all wizards and witches of the highest standing that could think for yourselves. I was obviously wrong if you believe the drivel that has been reported. You of all people Dumbledore should realize that what is stated in the papers is not necessarily the truth. If it was than are we to believe that you are an insane old wizard well beyond their use or capacity in instructing students at the finest magical school in the world?"

"Quite right, enough of this Albus, we will adjourn for 3 hours to review this proposal. If you would please wait here. We will have a

ministry worker provide you some lunch while you wait.” The man Humphries stated gruffly then stood grabbing the scroll and led the way out a side door. The other members quickly followed until only James and Albus Dumbledore remained in the room.

“I do not know what you are playing at Mr. Roper but I will find out.” He said dangerously trying to intimidate the young man.

“What you believe is your concern not mine. I am here on business for the Goblin Nation as I have said repeatedly. Good day to you sir.”

Without saying another word Dumbledore strode from the hall and Harry slipped into a meditative state in order to calm himself. He ignored the ministry worker that came in an hour later to provide the meal Humphries had promised.

The young clerk that brought the food in stared at the strange man for only a moment before she felt the urge to leave quickly. Why she wanted to leave she couldn't explain, she just did.

Harry vanished the food on the tray, he was not going to partake of any of it, and he didn't trust it. There was something off with it and instead of trying to figure out what it was he got rid of it. If they were going to play this game he would let them think they won, no doubt Dumbledore had something to do with it. Although they weren't openly disregarding the rules of etiquette in dealing with foreign government officials, they were only following the basics. No outright breach had occurred but they were close.

Nearly four hours later the sound of a door opening alerted Harry of the return of the Wizengamot members. Standing proudly in front of the dais again he waited for them to take their seats. Humphries sat in the middle this time with Lady Elaine by his side. With a glare at Dumbledore a few seats to his right he coughed and then proceeded to talk.

“We have reviewed the proposal of the Goblin High Council and have a few questions that need to be answered before we state our decision.”

"Very well I will answer as best I can." Harry stated calmly. He already knew the decision the council had made but was willing to humor them. Maybe he could make them see the errors of their ways maybe not but it was worth a shot.

"First of all we do not understand how the Goblins can claim right of ownership to the fortress known as Azkaban. We have exhausted all wizarding historical and legal references and no where can we find any documentation to support this claim."

"There in lies your answer sir." At the frustrated and confused looks he continued. "You state that you have exhausted all wizarding references?"

"Yes, of course, where else would we look?" Lady Elaine spoke up.

"Well my lady, is it not true that the Goblin Nation is much older than that of the wizarding world?" Several members nodded their heads. "Is it also true that the wizarding world has created laws banning other cultures from their acceptance as equals in the wizarding world?"

Again more head nods. "It then follows that the history of these cultures would also be banned from the wizarding world therefore excluding historical fact. It also follows that since most wizarding history books are written from the vantage point of the victors, which in most cases has been wizards and witches, significant facts were overlooked. As ambassador I have been allowed to read many tomes which the Goblins have maintained on their own history and have found that Azkaban is not the ancient fortress of one Lord Azkaban but is in actuality an ancient and revered cultural center of the goblins. In fact it is one of the first goblin colonies of this world. It was taken from them after battle as part of the spoils of war. Lord Eliziel Azkaban attacked and conquered the fortress in his quest to seek out a fabled artifact of immense power which was rumored to be held within the walls of the colony. Lord Azkaban spent his considerable long life searching for it to no avail. Angered that he had not found this boon, he banished all goblins from the island until such time as the wizarding world saw fit to relinquish their control and return it to the goblins."

"What is this object that he was searching for and what powers does it contain?" asked an as yet unidentified member.

"I am not privy to that information sir."

"Well what if it's something that could destroy us. We can't just give it back without knowing what we're getting ourselves into?" another member shouted. With that the Wizengamot broke down in to more debate ignoring the man before them. However Dumbledore continued to eye James shrewdly. The heated discussion went on for several hours before it lost its wind.

Humphries stood up from his seat and everyone quieted down. After looking at each member and some silent discussion he looked at James. "It is the decision of the Wizengamot that the Fortress Azkaban will remain in Ministry custody and that the petition by the Goblin High Council be refused." Deflated he sat back down waiting expectantly for James to say something.

"I am sorry to hear your decision as it will not be received well by the council."

"What do mean by that?" Dumbledore had once again found his voice. "Are you insinuating that because we refuse the Goblins will cause trouble? Will they join Voldemort?"

"Your fears of Voldemort outweigh the sound alliance you would have had with the Goblin Nation if you had accepted. The Goblins will not join Voldemort but they will also not join you when the fight comes and it will come. Before I leave I would offer you a piece of advice, look to securing Azkaban before you loose it."

"How dare you young man!"

"Geoffrey, stand down," Humphries said standing and leaning over his desk, "What do you mean that we should secure Azkaban? Are you saying the Goblins will attack?"



"I am saying no such thing. You have many Death Eaters locked away in Azkaban at this time and many more in some hidden location, or so say the papers. I am just merely stating the obvious. If Voldemort wants to continue his reign of terror he will need his most loyal followers. Good day to you all." With that Harry started to walk out of the hall but before he could get halfway to the doors a voice shouted out stopping him in his tracks.

"Aurors, arrest this man!" Dumbledore shouted.

James turned on his heels and glared directly at Dumbledore. "Dumbledore, you continually amaze me with your stupidity. I have done nothing that warrants my arrest. In fact as a government official acting on behalf of the Goblin Nation I technically have diplomatic immunity. Your actions here today have bordered on hostility and breach of conduct in dealing with negotiations. You have shamed yourself and those of the wizarding world with your bigoted and unjustified views. You have insulted a great and ancient magical race by your refusal to trust them today and you have angered me to no end. You will regret this day before the end, mark my words." Harry stated through bared teeth, he was seething and his aura shown brightly revealing to those present how powerful he was.

To the astonishment of the Wizengamot and the Aurors that had arrived James Roper disappeared into thin air despite the numerous wards in place to prevent such a feat. Dumbledore fell limply back into his seat cursing himself for making such a big mistake.

A/N: I do apologize to those readers out there that have continued their interest in my story. Once again, I am not abandoning it. Sometimes life takes priority and these last couple months have been rough. I am in the military and I just can't tell Uncle Sam that no, I'm not going to work longer hours because I want time for myself. It just doesn't work that way. All I can promise is that I WILL finish this story. It may take a little longer than I initially determined but it will be done. I am trying to get another chapter out shortly as I have a few days off now. Thankyou again for your patience. Meurysan

## Chapter 19 Meetings Galore

Harry immediately apparated to the inner council chamber within Gringotts. He was still angry at Dumbledore's attempts to discredit him in front of the Wizengamot although he did expect little difficulty and the refusal of the treaty. However Dumbledore's blatant disregard for required protocol between dignitaries infuriated him. He wasn't sure if it was his persona of James Roper, a wizard representing the Goblins for the first time in centuries, or if this was always how the old fool treated other races. Although there was proof of the latter from the past, he was pretty sure that Dumbledore was afraid of James Roper. Well, maybe 'afraid' wasn't the exact word for it; maybe 'threatened' would be a better word. No matter what, Dumbledore would not be getting away with this.

Harry waited for only a few minutes until a goblin showed up to escort him from the apparition point and into the council chamber. The goblins really did have a better system for security set up than anywhere he had seen in the wizarding world. Not only were the entrances to their buildings protected by numerous charms, traps and wards, but the internal structure was also protected with multiple layers of spells as well as other physical protections. The warning by the entrance to Gringotts was definitely one to take heed of. The apparition chamber he just exited was another prime example, as it contained individuals until thoroughly scanned for possible threats or ill intentions towards individuals within the structure or to the structure itself. Once completed a goblin would unlock the chamber and escort the individual to the appropriate area for their visit. In actuality, anyone unescorted within their buildings would get hopelessly lost if not escorted by a goblin. It was the reason only very few were privileged to apparate directly into the bank.

Upon arriving at the massive doors to the council chamber the goblin opened the door for Harry and waved him in to the waiting members. Harry bowed to the goblin then proceeded to the center of the chamber and formally presented his report on the proceedings with the Wizengamot. The goblins remained stoic throughout the report and the only sign of their contempt for the meeting was a feral gleam in the council leaders' eyes. Harry knew this was a sign that he was not happy with how his representative had been treated. There was

silence after Harry had finished and he waited patiently for their response.

“It seems from your report that the meeting went as you had expected Lord Potter. I am assuming that the plans we have discussed are falling into place?”

“Yes sir,” Harry nodded, “I did not expect the Wizengamot to sign the treaty but that now allows us to forgo formal diplomatic negotiations in the future unless you so desire. All requirements have been met in accordance with all laws established by wizards; the only difficulty is waiting for the opportune moment to arrive. I am currently working on that and will inform you immediately when the time comes.”

“We will remain patient until you contact us again, but will you not reconsider our offer to assist you during the fight?”

“I am honored that you would offer assistance but in accordance with the law, I will have to do this without it. No goblin would be able to step foot on the island until after I have control of it. If all goes even remotely according to plan, the ministry and the Order of the Phoenix will be assisting me, although they will not be aware of that fact.” Harry smiled evilly.

“You are a worthy choice as our representative Mr. Potter and we are honored to be able to work with you. As for the matter of the Wizengamots' treatment of you, we will file a formal petition, not that it will do much good, but that is also as expected. Is there anything else that needs to be done Mr. Potter or any other business you need to conduct while here?”

“No sir, by business now remains at Hogwarts.”

“I see, what about the legal proceedings we discussed, the documents are still protected, but wouldn't it be better to engage sooner rather than later?”

“No, as long as they remain protected that is all that matters at this point. For now everything is going smoothly, but if needed they will be my leverage. If I do not have to use them, then when this is over I will

formalize the charges. If that is all sir, I need to return to Hogwarts before I am missed."

"Very well, I see no other reason to detain you. Thank you again Mr. Potter and we look forward to the next time, until then may you live long, and may the Gods richly bless you."

"And you as well sir." Harry once again bowed and left the chamber.

Upon arriving in his rooms at Hogwarts, he was bombarded by a blur of red and knocked to the floor. His quick reflexes kept them from being hurt as he cast a cushioning charm on the floor and grabbed Ginny into a firm hug.

"How did it go? Did they sign or did they refuse like you expected? What did the Goblins say? Were they terribly furious? What did Dumbledore do?" she shot out in one breath.

"Ginny, wow, calm down there and let Harry breath." Remus laughed then sat down on one of the couches.

Ginny quickly pecked Harry on the lips and got up pulling him with her and sat across from Remus on the other couch. Harry sat beside her and leaned back relishing in the comfort of the soft cushions. The stress seemed to drain from him and he rubbed his eyes with both hands for a moment before starting once again to relay the events of the day.

While Harry was in the middle of explaining about the Wizengamot meeting, Remus flinched and reached into a pocket of his robes and pulled something out.

"What's wrong Moony?" Harry asked abruptly cutting off his narrative.

Remus, a bit startled looked down at the Phoenix pendant then back up to Harry, his lips drawn together in a slim line. "Remember what I told you about the Orders communication?" At Harry's affirmative nod he continued while Ginny looked on waiting for an explanation. "Well this is how Dumbledore alerts all members of a meeting."

“But I thought you said he had a more secure way to notify select members?” Ginny asked slightly confused.

“Oh he does, since I am no longer in the inner circle I no longer have whatever it was. He places a charm on it so only those entrusted with the device know how to use it. When it is removed from the individual or returned to Dumbledore they forget. It’s very similar to a built in obliviation spell that activates when no longer needed by the individual. Anyway this pendant is for “ALL” members of the Order. It’s been a long time since he’s called everyone.” He finished looking puzzled at the pendant.

“How many members have these things? Does it tell you where the meeting is?” Harry asked also eyeing the pendant. He was trying to discern if there were any listening charms or other security devices contained within that would compromise their situation.

“I can’t tell you that Harry, because I really don’t know. It’s never occurred to me before. As for the members you already know quite a few as well as those who are in the inner circle. I know Dumbledore has been recruiting for the last several years so I don’t know anything beyond those I have interacted with. I should be able to get a good estimate at the meeting.” Remus ruminated while turning the pendant over in his hand.

Harry pulled out his wand and levitated the pendant out of Remus’ hand and onto the coffee table between them and started scanning the device. After several minutes where all remained quiet and watching, Harry began chuckling to himself.

Ginny and Remus were startled out of their contemplation by this and looked at Harry sharply wondering what was amusing him.

“Harry I don’t see what’s so funny about this.” Ginny stated annoyed by his reaction.

Harry still laughing just told them to check for themselves. Remus went first and soon understanding sparkled in his eyes and a smile formed on his face. He nodded at Ginny who was growing in

consternation. She checked for herself and started snickering when she finally understood what they were laughing about.

"I can't believe with all Dumbledore's talk of security and protection that there is nothing else on this pendant." Remus stated.

"Well the old coot never did like keeping people informed and I just bet that he was counting on the fact that he had everyone so thoroughly brainwashed that no-one would ever think of checking the damn things like we did. No wonder there are leaks in the order." Harry stated angrily at Dumbledore's foolishness and hypocrisy.

"This is going to come in handy." Ginny snickered. "Think of all the possibilities. While they concentrate on trying to follow us around and gather useless information, all we have to do is wait for this little beauty to tell us when they're meeting and show up."

"I hope it's not that easy Ginny." Harry frowned. "Remember all the charms they put up at Grimauld Place when we were there. I think they would at least put up similar wards and charms, maybe a bit more. Mad-eye I am sure would insist upon it what with his stance on "constant vigilance". There's also his eye that can see through a lot of things."

"Yeah well, you kinda of blew that advantage out of the water cub. I won't need to hide myself but I think you and Ginny could hide easily with none the wiser. Although, it might be easier if I just showed you the memories in a pensieve so you have time for other things. This brings me to another matter Harry. Tonks asked me to talk to you today about her."

"What?" both Harry and Ginny nearly shouted at the same time.

Holding up his hands to fend off their arguments Remus continued, "Harry she only wants to help. She told me she's not satisfied with the order and doesn't agree with what's been done in the past. She's really upset with everything that's going on especially with what they've been doing to you. Now I know I'm no-where near as advanced as you are Harry in determining deceit or honesty in people,

but I believe I'm far enough along to know she's telling me what she believes. I saw no dishonesty in her."

"Moony, I trust you, if you believe it then I will talk to her but it won't be in Hogwarts. We can't afford any more attention. These rooms are secure but anything outside this suite is not. You and Ginny are already in enough heat for living with me, Tonks would be suspect the moment she showed herself in Gryffindor tower." Harry said rubbing his chin while forming a plan.

"Harry we could give her one of the special portkeys you made. I wouldn't be comfortable though until after you've been able to meet with her yourself." Ginny offered.

"I agree Ginny. Moony, she'll be at this meeting tomorrow won't she?"

"Yes she should be. She didn't say anything about quitting the order yet; don't think she's actually sure what she wants to do about that. She could be useful to us in that she's often included in the inner circle meetings. If she agrees to help us she could also get us inside information on the Auror's activities."

"Blimey Harry, that's a brilliant idea Moony. Tonks is always been underestimated because of her clumsiness, but I've wondered about her for a while. I think that's all an act, and a very good one. We'd have to train her Harry. What do you think?"

"I like the idea, but I want to talk to her first. Can you have her meet us at the Shrieking Shack tomorrow afternoon Moony? Also make sure she's willing to be questioned under veritaserum for her intentions only, I won't dig for anything other than what she's willing to tell. I'd also like to perform a quick legilimency scan for the same thing. If she's willing, then we'll meet in the 'real' shack. If she passes we'll show her the both the shack and here and I'll give her a portkey so she can train with us. The only problem is I'm not going to be around much to get her up to speed. You and Ginny are going to have to work on that. Hopefully she's had some occlumency training already and would only need to step it up a bit."

“Sure thing Harry, it’ll be great to have another feminine opinion around here.”

“Hey what’s that’s suppose to mean?” Harry said taking offense to her comment.

“Just that’s there’s too much testosterone running rampant around here some times. A girl needs a break from that once in a while.” She deadpanned.

“Please no, we don’t need constant giggling around here.” Harry said rolling his eyes. “I won’t be able to stand it.”

“Cub you’ll learn to put up with a lot of things in your life. School girl giggling is the least of your worries.”

“MOOONEYYYYY” Harry whined exaggeratedly.

“Now now cub, some things are worth it.” Remus shot back playfully shaking his finger at Harry.

“Fine!” Harry spat and crossed his arms in front of his chest in mock pouting.

Ginny couldn’t take it anymore and burst out laughing at his antics, he looked so cute with those brilliant emerald eyes and his bottom lip poking out. The fact that his position only made his arm muscles more pronounced had absolutely nothing to do with her mouth going dry and her insides melting like butter. She couldn’t resist and leaned forward and kissed Harry firmly on those pouting lips and was rewarded by his surprised reaction before he responded eagerly. Pulling back she noticed the dazed look in his eyes before a fire sprang to life in them, realizing what that meant she softly whispered in his ear promising him full attention later.

Harry wanted the conversation over with so he could make Ginny fulfill her promises. Gaining control of himself he smirked at her then returned his attention to Remus as Ginny snuggled up next to him on the couch. It was a warm feeling that tingled throughout his body urging him again to get this all over with for now.



“So anyway,” he started, “back to the meeting. I think Moony should go to this one. I have some other pressing engagements that I need to take care of. Gin you have some surveillance work to do and remember what I told you about the paintings here at Hogwarts. Both of you need to keep a constant watch out on them and not say anything unless you want it reported to the headmaster. I still want my cloak back even though it’s not a priority. Whatever you come up with Gin will help.”

“I’ve got some really good ideas Harry, we’ll discuss them later though. There’s still a few things I need to gather and a few things I need to set in motion.”

“Well you both look really tired and there’s not much else to really go over until I can talk to Tonks about a few things. Are we still training in the morning?” Remus questioned while standing up and stretching.

“Of course, can’t have you two slacking off. OWWW, Ginny that hurt.” Harry said mock whining as he rubbed his chest where she had just playfully punched him.

Ginny just rolled her eyes and leaned forward over him to kiss his sore spot. “Awww poor baby. I’ll have to remember your weak spot for the next time we duel. Guess you’re not as hard as I thought. Just quivering mass of fat.”

“Hey I take offense to that, I’ve worked hard for this body and I know you like it.” He said winking at her and kissing the top of her head.

Remus although glad that Harry and Ginny were so comfortable around each other was a little sickened by the mushy banter that was going back and forth. He really wished though that he could be in the same position with a certain multi-talented witch. “Ginny’s right cub, let’s get some sleep. I think we’re good for now and I’ll place my memories in the pensieve when I’m done with the Order meeting for you to look at later.” With that Remus left still thinking about what would happen with Tonks tomorrow. Although he was tired, he still felt in better shape than he had ever been and it was all thanks to his

godson. There was definitely hope for the future and he felt it warm through to his soul convincing him there was hope for him as well.

Ginny watching Remus depart shoved her fist into her mouth to stop the laughter threatening to spill forth. Harry oblivious, as he was lost in his own thoughts was brought back to reality at the sound of a snort next to him.

Turning his head slightly, he cocked an eyebrow at the vivacious red head curled next to him and her attempts to eat her fist. "Did you just snort?" he asked.

Ginny dragged her sparkling eyes away from the door Remus had just entered and dropped her hand into her lap. "Of course I didn't. I do not snort. I was however trying very hard not to laugh."

"What's so funny?"

"Sometimes you astound me Harry. Just when I think you've grown up you revert to a simple minded school boy."

"I am not!" he protested. "Maybe if you would just tell me I would know?"

"Some things don't need telling Harry. Some things you have to figure out for yourself, even if it's staring you right in the face." She finished in a whisper.

That really hit a nerve with Harry and he shot up out of his seat and started pacing. Was he really that blind? Was he acting like Dumbledore? Was she actually insinuating that? Wait a bloody minute! What the bloody hell are we talking about? Thinking back over the last several hours he sifted through what they had discussed then went through the emotions that correlated to the discussion. He started noticing the little idiosyncrasies about Remus' behavior, as he was sure it had nothing to do with himself and Ginny. He noticed how Remus would slightly blush when discussing Tonks, how he didn't want to invade her privacy by reading her mind without permission, subtle bursts of emotion at certain things he and Ginny said that referred to intimacy. Looking closer at Remus' aura he could see the

unmistakable signs of love, respect, caring, trust and a myriad of others that revealed much more than words. Remus was in love with Tonks! A wicked smile slowly grew on Harry's face as he realized what was going on. He stopped pacing and looked back over his shoulder at Ginny sitting on the couch with the same smile and glint in her eyes. Yes, this was definitely something that would need looking into and he only hoped it was something he could help with and Tonks was being truthful.

"Let's get some sleep Harry." Ginny suggested as she languidly pulled herself off the couch and reached out for him.

Harry responded taking her hand in his and pulled her into a hug. Whispering back in her ear she couldn't help but giggle slightly and lead Harry into his bedroom.

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The next evening Harry was in a good mood, as the day's events had turned out favorable. Tonks had been more than adamant about helping Harry and readily agreed to the questioning under the truth serum and submitting to a legilimency scan by Harry. Harry had found only that Tonks truly wanted to help and was dissatisfied with how things were being handled by the Order as well as the Ministry. She was so disillusioned to the former 'illustrious' Albus Dumbledore that it was becoming difficult for her to carry out any of the missions he assigned her. She trusted Harry and he did not want to betray that trust, unlike certain others he knew. She swore a wizarding oath on her magic and her life to never divulge their secrets or act against their group. Upon completing the oath Harry revealed the secret of the Shrieking Shack and she was in awe of what he had been able to do. The others laughed at her reaction and anxiously anticipated her reaction to everything that would be revealed later. They discussed her skill level and Harry was relieved that Tonks had a good grasp on occlumency. He tested her shields and although they were good for now, they wouldn't stand a chance against Dumbledore or Snape if they really wanted in. It wouldn't take her that long to get up to speed with Ginny and Remus after she completed the transfer. They didn't discuss the transfer just in case anyone suspected her and would only see that she had talked with Harry Ginny and Remus but not

what it was about if they decided to check her mind. Her other skills were would be a good basis for her to start with, as well they should be as she was a Ministry trained Auror. With Remus and Ginny's help she'd be right on par with them quickly which was good as Harry was sure he would be needing her help sooner rather than later.

Harry and Ginny left to go back to the castle shortly after the discussion as it was getting close to dinnertime, while Tonks and Remus stayed to talk. Tonks was so excited and could barely contain herself, which made Remus laugh at her antics and Ginny and Harry roll their eyes with a knowing smile gracing their lips. Tonks had several fanciful ideas of what would happen next, none close to the reality of the situation, but Remus indulged her and they spent a comical few hours together before the Order meeting.

Halfway across the country in a dank dark dungeon Voldemort sat on his lonely throne contemplating recent events. His loyal followers had been called and were just starting to arrive. Lucius Malfoy stood silently beside his throne waiting for his direction. 'Yes, Lucius was one of his most faithful followers. No matter what happened the man found a way to slip away and return to serve him. Even though he was now persona-non-grata with the ministry, which infuriated him, he still had his uses and his vast resources would serve his cause well. He had already punished the man for his mistakes and was sure that Lucius would rise above in order to prove himself to his master. Yes, Lucius was definitely one of his most trusted. He was now working hard to put together a plan that would swell his ranks and make his army unstoppable by those inferior fools in the ministry, the Order would fall shortly after. If everything went according to plan the ministry and those imbeciles loyal to Dumbledore wouldn't know what hit them and Azkaban would be his.'

The last of his followers arrived but he waited and reveled in the fear and anxiety that swept through the room. "My faithful Death Eaters, the time has come to show the world who possesses the greater power! I have developed a plan to attack and claim Azkaban as my own. It will become an impenetrable fortress from which we will lay claim to the rest of the world and rule with an iron hand. Only my most faithful will be involved in the planning phase. Lucius, Severus, Bella, and Rodolphus will stay to hear the details of the attack. The

rest of you will lie low until you are called. I do not want anyone knowing of this, we will take them all by surprise and even that new Mysterious Wizard,” he spat, “ will not know of our plans until too late. Be ready for battle the next time you are called. NOW GO!”

All those except the ones to take part in the planning quickly left. During the commotion no one saw the faintest of smirks grace the face of Malfoy Sr..

The Great Hall of Hogwarts was silent; the corridors eerily empty except for the feline menace of Mrs. Norris and of course her faithful human Mr. Filch. They stalked the corridors looking for students out of bounds as if it was the most important task to perform. Little did he or anyone else know that in an unused lecture hall of the 3rd floor corridor something much more important and of greater magnitude was taking place. As soon as dinner had finished those members of the Order of the Phoenix present at Hogwarts made their way immediately to the meeting room to await the others.

Remus and Tonks only spared the slightest of nods to each other upon arriving separately in order to avoid any suspicions. Many people arrived filling the room to capacity. Both Tonks and Remus kept silent count of the numbers and committing to memory as many faces as possible. Harry would be glad of the information but shocked that there were no security measures in place to detect unwanted guests. Dumbledore obviously thought Hogwarts safer than anywhere else to forgo precautions despite the evidence supporting otherwise over the years. Foolishly he was blinded by his confidence and arrogance, which Remus had never seen fully before now.

Every single Weasley, except Ginny, arrived and Tonks noticed curiously how Bill, Charlie and the twins sat far away from their parents, Ron and Hermione. Looking over to her werewolf friend, she saw him looking between the 2 groups of Weasley's before catching her eye. Both raised an eyebrow in question at the other and they both stifled a chuckle at their similar thinking.

By the time Dumbledore walked in, Remus had counted 120 odd members and hadn't seen Snape arrive. Before he could wonder at the man's absence, Dumbledore's voice captured the attention of

everyone in the room. The doors shut and everyone took a seat in the auditorium style seating. Tonks quickly scanned the doors and found only a silencing charm on it to keep what was said in the room from prying ears. She scoffed at this and reaffirmed her actions in joining Harry and the others. Even the ministry had more secure protections than this and Dumbledore was the one spouting off about how insecure the ministry was. It was a laughable hypocrisy even if it weren't so dire a situation.

"If I may have your attention please." Dumbledore announced to the already silent crowd. "We have a lot to discuss at this meeting and it concerns all present. I fear we have reason to believe that Voldemorts' forces are growing exponentially. We have recently received information that although the Dementors' that guard Azkaban have not abandoned their posts, they have decided to join with the Dark Lord."

Several gasps raced through the crowd as if this was something unexpected and Dumbledore and others hadn't pointed this out numerous times before. Dumbledore raised his hands for silence and it took only a few moments for everyone to quiet down once again, their attention riveted on the old wizened wizard.

"This not only places the Ministry in danger, but the entire wizarding world, for at some point I believe Voldemort to attack Azkaban. QUIET PLEASE!" he shouted as more gasps and angered shouts swept the crowd. "Our spies are working on retrieving any information they can to assist the light side in the war so we still have to be patient and bide our time until then. Remember that our spies are risking their lives to gain this information and we must not compromise them." Again, conversations erupted throughout the room discussing the possibilities and dangers. Remus thought it quite odd that he referenced his spies, there was really only one spy, he also thought it strange that he did not bring up the secret holding cells at the ministry where all captured Death Eaters were now being kept. Either he was trying to keep them secret to avoid any leaks or he was attempting to instill some fear into people. He hoped that it was because Dumbledore feared spies in the Order, but then why did he not take more precautions for the meetings? He would definitely make sure Harry was aware of this.

“PLEASE LET US MOVE ON FOR NOW!” Dumbledore once again shouted with his magically enhanced voice. “We have at least 2 more matters to discuss this evening before you are released back to your own devices. Yesterday I witnessed a very strange and disturbing event. The Wizengamot was called together at the last minute to receive an ambassador from the Goblin Nation petitioning the Ministry for the return of Azkaban to the Goblins.....”

“That’s absurd...” a male voice bellowed from somewhere in the mass of people, “The Goblins never owned Azkaban, how can they ask for it back?”

“Tis’ true! What right do they have to claim such falsehoods?” An elderly woman who had seen better days agreed.

Hermione acting in her typical know-it-all, I’m smarter than anyone mode, stood and cleared her throat catching the attention of most members. She stood primly waiting for Dumbledore to acknowledge her, which he did with a nod and a sigh, which Remus found quite humorous. Dumbledore was obviously a little miffed with the young witch.

“The earliest account and documentation for Azkaban dates back to 1513 to the Noble Lord Azkaban. The island and properties thereupon located remained in that family until the last count turned the island and fortress over to the Ministry of Magic in 1602 in reparation for debts incurred by the count. Since that time...”

“Thank you Miss Granger, I believe that is enough of a history lesson for everyone.” Dumbledore chided as gently as he could without showing his frustration and let slip his grandfatherly persona.

Remus rolled his eyes in disgust, not only at Granger but the fact that Dumbledore knew the truth as presented to the Wizengamot and didn’t say anything. In fact there were several lies the old man was blatantly telling tonight, or was purposely withholding pertinent facts, but no one but him and maybe a few others knew it. He couldn’t believe this man and marveled that he had never seen it before until Harry was incarcerated. Wasn’t the old man berating himself

everyday for the mistakes he had made with Harry? Didn't he learn his lesson then? He was repeating them and would rue the day when this was over even though he didn't realize it was Harry causing all this commotion in the world. Remus knew he couldn't afford to say anything right now.

"As Miss Granger has so enthusiastically detailed for us, the Wizengamot also was unable to find anything beyond what she has outlined. We found no evidence to support the Goblins request and therefore it was denied. The ambassador present did not take too kindly to the rejection and threatened us if we did not reconsider our actions." Dumbledore solemnly stated with his head slightly lowered as if saddened by the thought.

Remus was now fuming and wanted so badly to call out the liar. What was the insane idiot trying to do incite a war with the Goblins by adding more animosity between the two races? What he was saying could very well result in the destabilization of the wizarding economy if people started wondering if the Goblins would start a war. If it spread people would start withdrawing their money from the Goblin banks and chaos would ensue. Did he honestly think he could manipulate the Goblins into his court by scaring everyone this way? Before Dumbledore could continue however, Remus noticed out of the corner of his eye that Bill Weasley stood abruptly.

"Headmaster, with all due respect, I do not know where you are getting your information but you are not correct in what the Ambassador and the Goblin Council are suing for. Although they did not like the fact that the treaty they proposed to the Wizengamot was refused so abruptly, they do not seek to start a war nor do they seek to cause any further trouble within the wizarding world. The council stated this to us directly at an emergency meeting just this morning where all employees were mandated to attend. They assured us that other than filing a formal protest with the Ministry about the way in which their ambassador was treated by the Wizengamot, that everything was to proceed as business as usual." Bill reported with a glare in his eyes as if daring Dumbledore to challenge him. Dumbledore was taken aback by this but only those that were looking saw the slight anger in his blue eyes and his pursed lips before regaining control once again a few seconds later.



"Thank you for your report Bill. Our main concern is that their ambassador was not only disparaging of wizard kind but a wizard himself. He radiated a dark aura and I feel this cannot be good for relations between wizards and goblins. His name is James Roper and we must learn all we can about this wizard in order to keep him out of the situation. He needs to be neutralized. We cannot afford to have him interfering and destroying all that exists!" he stated adamantly.

Finally Remus had had enough; this was outlandish for even the most paranoid. "Headmaster, I must disagree. I fail to see how a wizard who was chosen to represent the Goblin Nation is such a threat to us. They trust him, why shouldn't we? It is a great honor that the Goblins consider this wizard worthy to represent them. Bill has already stated that the Goblins have no desire to go against wizarding law let alone start a war. I don't know about the rest of you, but until we are able to prove this man guilty of what you are accusing, it does us no good to fight him. It belittles our goals and morals as an order trying to fight for the Light to slander him without proper proof."

"He is a dark wizard Remus." Dumbledore argued.

"Where is your proof? Does he have the Dark Mark burned into his skin? Has he killed anyone? Does he have a record of crimes? What exactly has he done to incur your wrath Dumbledore?" Remus challenged.

"Hey! We know that name?" Fred Weasley exclaimed jumped up from his seat with his twin not far behind him.

"Fred and George Weasley! You two sit down this instant! You don't know what you are talking about." Molly Weasley shouted as she stood, hands already on her hips in full Molly Weasley battle mode.

"Please Molly," Dumbledore placated, "I would like to hear what they have to say." He finished eyes the twins a little suspiciously.

"Fine! But I'm warning you two!" she said glaring at her boys that she had overlooked were now men.

Once Molly was seated, Dumbledore nodded to the twins to relate their story.

“Well you see...” Fred started.

“It actually happened earlier this summer in Hogsmeade....” George continued.

“We were sitting in our shop minding our own business...”

“Yes, actually preparing for our big opening...”

“Stacking products on our shelves, lots of work that....”

“Totally agree brother, heavy things they are with all our wonderful gadgets and gadgets ....”

“Making sure that every item was in the perfect spot for everyone to see so they couldn’t resist....”

“Especially those of school age...”

“PLEASE, gentlemen get on with it, how do you know this man.”  
Dumbledore interrupted.

“Like we were saying,” George picked up.

“We were setting up shop when some strange man burst through the door carrying....”

“Our unconscious baby sister. It was very suspicious indeed, but...”

“He seemed truly concerned and told us of a Dementor attack she had been involved in...”

“He put her on our couch and introduced himself as James Roper....”

“He even knew to give Ginny chocolate to counter the effects of those beasts....”

“The next day at the opening he shows up to buy some of our Fake wands for...”

“some work party or something.”

“That’s It!” Ron exploded snorting as if the information was nothing and had wasted all their time. Molly had paled slightly next to her husband upon hearing that Dementors’ had attacked her baby girl and she didn’t know about it. Anger soon replaced her fear as she realized no one had told her about it. Arthur’s calm gentle hand on her arm was the only thing keeping her from exploding worse than her youngest son had.

“Mr. Weasley, Please sit down.” Dumbledore said sternly to the now red-faced Ron. Hermione reached over and patted his arm attempting to silently console him after the rebuke from the Headmaster.

“I do believe this may be important. Fake wands indeed you say?” Dumbledore questioned more to himself raising an eyebrow and seeking out the Order members who had been transported to the Ministry to find the documents that had freed Harry. Remus also followed his gaze to each individual and saw shock, understanding, and awe on their faces. Dumbledore definitely was not happy.

At that moment the doors blasted open slamming into the walls on either side making most of the people jump out of the seats from fright as well as many pulling their wands as they sought out the possible danger. Looking self-important and above everyone, Severus Snape stormed into the room with his trademark billowing robes. The pompous git didn’t stop until he was center stage right next to Dumbledore and whispering into the old man’s ears. Dumbledore nodded for several minutes as he took the information in, then held up his hands thwarting the greasy potions master from saying anymore. Snape smugly sat at the desk behind the headmaster as if it belonged to him and remained quiet.

Taking several deep breaths, Dumbledore composed himself once again and spoke up, “It is as I feared. Voldemort plans to move on Azkaban within the month.” Chaos erupted but neither Tonks nor Remus could understand why as it was just covered a short while ago.

“QUIET!...Please everyone!...Severus has risked his life to bring this information to us, let us not waster our time now. We do not have specifics on Voldemorts’ plans but Severus will notify us when he has more information via the pendant.”

“Don’t you think it wise to also notify the ministry of this development Albus? They could plus up the numbers at the prison as well as place more Aurors' on call.” Kingsley Shacklebolt stated.

“Aye, I agree Albus, if their gonna go for Azkaban it ain’t likely their gonna use a small force. That bloody prison is nearly impregnable and a force to be reckoned with. We need as many people to fight as possible.” Mad-eye added.

“I don’t believe so,” Dumbledore said scratching his beard as if puzzling over something, “I think that the Dark Lord wants his followers who are interred at Azkaban. He won’t use large numbers, he will try to slip in undetected before anyone notices he’s been there.”

“I disagree, he’s never done anything quiet like.” Mad-eye stated. “During the first war he made sure the world new it was him behind all those attacks. Weakened the public it did. It was all about inflicting as much fear as he could. No one was immune to it, why would he do any different this time. If he were able to break in to Azkaban he’d want everyone to know about it.”

“May I ask a question sir?” Tonks spoke up a little timidly.

“What is it Nymphadora?” Dumbledore said turning his attention to the young Auror.

Tonks grimaced at the use of her real name but let it slide for now. “I was just wondering who he actually planned to get out of Azkaban? I mean there’s not one of Voldemorts’ followers there that could be of any use to him. Malfoy, the Lestranges’, Dolohov, are all out and at large in the country, it’s even been in the Daily Prophet. What could he want with a basically empty prison?” she ended. Darting her eyes quickly to Remus she saw the slight gleam dance in his eyes before she returned attention back to the headmaster.

"She does have a good point Albus." Moody grudgingly agreed.

"Is it something to do with the Potter boy?" an anonymous male voice shouted out. This seemed to create another round of outbursts throughout the hall, which served to greatly annoy the headmaster who was barely able to conceal it.

The sound of fireworks lit the hall as Dumbledore raised his wand; it was becoming a habit of his now a days to regain the out of control crowds he unfortunately was privy to more and more. Ironical really when not too many years ago his very presence demanded quiet.

"I do not believe it has anything to do with young Mr. Potter. We will be discussing his progress shortly. Now as for Azkaban, I agree we need to tell a small contingent of trustworthy Aurors' about a planned attack so they will be able to help us when the time comes. I will trust that endeavor to both Kingsley and Alastor." He said pointedly staring at the two mentioned. He then scanned the rest of the room seeking out any other discontent that might still be lingering. "That will be all on that topic for tonight, when we have more information we will set further plans. Now let us discuss the progress of young Harry, or shall we say lack thereof. It seems as though from all reports that he is distancing himself from everyone more and more with the passing of each day. All attempts to try and reach out to him have failed and I feel we may need to take a more direct approach."

"Excuse me headmaster, but I believe you made your first error with that insolent brat in agreeing to allow him use of his own quarters. The fact that the Weasley girl and the Werewolf are with him only further serves to make him more arrogant in flaunting this over the rest of us. The boy should be removed from Hogwarts if he is so adamant in removing himself from the populous." Snape snidely stated.

Remus remained quiet until someone asked his report on events. Seething inside at Snape's biased comments but withstanding the urge to rip the hypocrite's head off he remained quiet.

"I agree that I Made a mistake in granting Mr. Potter his own room, as he has shown no interest in interacting in normal social behavior as he once did. I have thought long and hard on this and have determined to return him to the Gryffindor dormitory if there is no significant improvement by Halloween. However, I believe we need to hear from Remus Lupin to gather an update on his progress. Remus?"

Standing and taking a breath to calm himself Remus started. "It seems as though you have already made up your mind on what course of action you are going to take with Harry, with or without my input. I warn you now not to go back on your word headmaster. Despite what you may think, Harry is making progress. He is still wary of most people, with due cause might I add, and has talked to Ginny Weasley and myself about some things. I will not betray the trust he has placed in me by discussing the details of our conversations; suffice to say that he is focusing on doing the best he can here at Hogwarts. His schoolwork affirms this even if his social interaction, as you say is lacking. There is nothing within the bylaws of this school nor in wizarding law that states he has to make friends or participate in extracurricular activities if he does not wish to." Holding up a hand to fend off rebukes he could see forming in the body language of some of the Order members he continued. "Harry is a legal adult and can do as he deems right himself. Forcing him to do anything against his will is not in his best interest nor your own." He finished. Tonks raised her eyebrow appraisingly to him and he winked back at her, no one noticed the interchange.

"Headmaster?" the bushy haired ex-best friend of Harry Potter stood waiting to be recognized again. Remus rolled his eyes but staid any comment.

"Yes Miss Granger?" the headmaster acknowledged.

"Professor Lupin may feel that Harry is progressing but some of the students feel that he has an unfair advantage as well as Ginny. It is becoming a problem." She stated snobbishly and sniffed as if something fowl just wafted her way.

"Please explain?" Dumbledore prompted.

“Well....Frankly, its unfair headmaster! Harry has his own personal tutor and is advancing faster than anyone in our year. Ginny is already at the top of her year group and is starting to work on 7th year material. They can't be achieving this without some help with what has happened!”

Remus had again reached his limit. “So, you are saying Miss Granger that the fact that Harry is surpassing YOU in grades means that he's cheating somehow and that Miss Weasley is also cheating. Let me assure you that I have done nothing but be there for both of them when they need to talk and provide the board and other parents assurance that proper conduct is being followed. Everything they have done has been done on their own! Harry, nor Ginny, have ever come to me about their schoolwork in any way shape or form.”

At Snape's disbelieving scoff Hermione somehow gained some courage to challenge Remus in front of everyone present. “How can that be? I mean Harry missed a whole year professor! He can't have been able to complete the entire sixth year curriculum since he escaped and now advance beyond m...most 7th year students. They have to be getting help from someone else!” she stated adamantly, so entrenched in her belief that she was right and no one could be smarter than herself.

Remus narrowed his eyes at the accusation and nearly let his inner wolf take control. “Are you calling me a liar Miss Granger?” Granger backed down a little at this, surprised to have that fury turned fully on herself, but it was obvious she was still outraged at being out-done in school by both Harry and Ginny. It was sad really that this was what she was focused on, the only thing that made her life worth while, Remus thought reflecting on it. “Harry has always been a smart young man, Granger. He may have leaned on your academic proficiency in the first 5 years here at Hogwarts, but over the last year he had had to rely on himself and found he is quite capable. You all forget that time in Azkaban drastically changes a person.”

“That is precisely why we are concerned about his development Remus.” Dumbledore injected. Remus didn't miss the subtle derailment of the previous argument. “We cannot afford for him to

turn against us and join the dark forces. He must be persuaded to return to his life. If he does not, he risks falling for the subtle lure of the dark arts. He must be trained for the future to fight against this evil. Right now he does not trust us, he has to be made to understand that we have his best interests at heart!"

"And you think this is the way to go about it?" Remus shot back. "He does not trust anyone for a good many reasons! My God, do you people have clouds in your brains! You of all people should know headmaster with all your years of experience that trust cannot be forced. It is something that has to be earned. Have you all forgotten what happened to him? This is not just about Azkaban! The entire wizarding world betrayed him and sent him to hell to rot! The closest people he had to family spat on him and confirmed his worst fears! They abandoned him to the fate, which was decided for him by power hungry, conniving, bloodthirsty traitors! After almost an entire year in that hell hole surrounded by Dementors' every minute of every day without anyone to comfort him, do you think he is able, let alone willing to just forget it all ever happened? It doesn't work that way people; open your eyes for Merlin's sake! He needs time and understanding, he's working on it believe me! He will decide when he is ready to open up with others and accept them into his life." Remus finished forcefully.

"We do not have the time to wait until the boy gets his act together!" Mad-eye stated without emotion. His many years of service in the Auror ranks had obviously done more to damage the man than what it did to his body, Remus speculated.

"His is just a child! If Azkaban was as hard on him as you say, he is probably very confused and even less able to decide what is best for himself, the poor boy. Maybe he should come stay at the Burrow for a while with people who love and care about him." Molly Weasley stated almost in tears.

Remus' eyes nearly bugged out of his head at that comment and almost felt sick. Looking around he could tell others felt the same. Snape hadn't looked so green in a long time. "Do not be mistaken Molly, or any of you, Harry is no child, he never really was. He was



never given that opportunity. Any innocence that he once had is now gone. He is very much a man in his own right, one of which I am very proud to know. He can take care of himself better than you can possibly imagine. If you are all too blind to see what is before your very eyes that I pity you for what it will cost you in the end. As for the Order, I again warn you not to force Harry into doing something against his will, it will not be a pleasant experience for you.” With that said Remus strode from the room tired of the bickering and foolish idiots that made up the organization which he was once proud to be considered a part of. He was only mildly concerned about not hearing the outcome of the meeting, Tonks was sure to fill them in on it when she could, but he could no longer abide the hypocritical lies and falsitudes.

Upon entering their suite he noticed that neither Ginny nor Harry were back from their outings. He approached the closet in which they kept the pensieves, saying the proper incantation and password he pulled out the common pensieve they all shared and dropped the memory of the Order meeting within the silvery liquid. Seeing that it was secure he placed the warning charm on it that would notify both Ginny and Harry when they returned that there was something for them to view. He took one more look around trying to figure out what he should do while waiting for everyone but was too restless. Rubbing the back of his neck he stalked to the cupboard Harry kept the alcohol in and decided to have a glass of wine and maybe read in front of the fire for a while.

## Chapter 20

When Harry returned he noticed first that Remus was asleep in one of the arm chairs by the fireplace with a bottle of Firewhiskey on the table in front of him. The shot glass he had been drinking from had dropped when the man had dozed off and hadn't heard it break. 'Must've been a pretty rough Order meeting,' he thought looking around to see if Ginny was back yet. Seeing she wasn't around, he turned his attention to the pensieve and noticed the glow surrounding it. Unwilling to deal with anymore stress at the moment, he tried to ignore the thing and sat down on the couch across from Remus and grabbed the bottle of liquor taking a few swigs. Periodically sipping from the bottle he studied the man that had become so important in his life and realized why his dad and Sirius had thought so much of him as well.

Remus had searched for him after he escaped purely in order to make sure he was safe and protected. Now he was spying for him against people he had once trusted with his life. This man who had been outcast by the world into which he was born stayed strong and loyal and hopeful for a time when everyone could live a life free of tyranny and prejudiced. How this man continued on was anyone's guess really, but Harry believed it was for many of the same reasons he pushed onwards as well. He swore to himself that no matter what he'd do anything to keep those he loved safe and alive to fulfill their dreams for the future. Part of that he reminded himself was keeping his plan moving and for that he couldn't slack off. Placing the bottle back on the table he stood resolutely, stretched and then walked over to the pensieve to view the Order meeting he presumed Remus had placed in it.

After viewing the memory he sat back down critically itemizing the information he had gained. Not much happened that surprised him although he was aggravated that the Order members continued to bicker amongst themselves rather than make plans to fight the war they were right in the middle of. What was Dumbledore's agenda in allowing this to happen? Was it on purpose or was the man already too old and senile to be leading the side of light? He figured it was more of the latter, Dumbledore had obviously seen many things in his long life that could numb person's feelings. Although having too much

emotion one way or another could hinder logical decision making, some emotion was still necessary in reminding one of what they fought for. Dumbledore's judgment and focus were clouded and in turn it was having the effect of clouding the decisions and actions of the Order of the Phoenix.

Unwilling to dwell on the idiocy of certain younger members, he focused on his theory concerning one particularly vile tempered potions master. It seemed that his theory was confirmed if the actions of said man didn't say anything further after Remus left the meeting, he would find out for sure tomorrow after reviewing Tonks memory. The degenerate bat believed he played the perfect role of the double agent, constantly confusing but appearing to help whichever side he chose to play at the time. Neither side truly knew where his loyalties lie but the infernal turncoat had them all believing he was too important to get rid of, which in turn kept his life intact for whatever devious plan he had concocted. He was slicker than the grease that coated his vile head. All this however, wouldn't be enough to save him in the end and Harry had the perfect punishment awaiting the petulant excuse for a wizard.

Returning to the real world, he noticed that Remus was awake and waiting patiently for something. Examining the room he realized Ginny had returned and was waiting to view the pensieve information. So he sat comfortably sipping his drink and waited. As she exited he could tell from her fiery eyes that she wasn't happy about the events that took place. He waited for her to join them knowing better than to say anything just yet, until she had control of her temper.

Plopping herself down next to Harry she crossed her arms over her chest taking deep breaths for control to keep from exploding. Since she had started working with Harry she had made leaps and bounds in this arena and wasn't about to let it slip. She had to stay clear headed for this in order to gain her revenge. Knowing it really wouldn't do any good she still wanted it, it was her childish side that she was willing to indulge if just for this one thing. "OK....." she started, "It looks as if you left early Moony. So is Tonks going to fill us in on the rest of the meeting?"

Remus looked up taking in the sight of the still fiery redhead across from him. He was proud of her ability to push aside the anger, but at the same time winced at the thought of what tomorrow's workout would be like when she released the tension. Harry seemed to be thinking along the same lines causing Remus to smirk. "Yes, Tonks will be by to transfer the memory to my pensieve and then I can place it into the one here. I'm not sure how long the meeting went on, but as you saw I was beyond my level of tolerance when I left."

"I thought you spoke quite eloquently Moony, but it seems as though these people can't understand cold hard facts. They're in their own disillusioned world that follows their own disillusioned rules which contrast sharply with those of common sense." Harry responded.

"Where did that come from?" Ginny asked smiling with mock astonishment.

"Well every once in a while....."

"Never mind Harry. So we'll know more once Tonks gets here tomorrow." She cut in. Looking at Harry out of the corner of her eye she almost laughed at the pouty face he was making. Nudging him in the ribs gently she turned and smiled at him. Harry smiled back and decided to get to the point.

"Moony you can show her the suite here. Give her one of the portkeys and the password. I trust her and it will make things easier. We have a lot to do in the next several weeks and it will make it easier for us all to train in order to be ready for Halloween. I'm hoping that all three of you will be up to par in your occlumency as well as other areas. I realize Tonks may be behind in some things but she is a trained Auror which should make it a little less difficult to catch up. No matter what, we can't let anyone in the Order know what's going on especially Bumbles or Snape."

"We've been very careful about this Harry and I'll make sure Tonks understands as well. Have you found any new information on Snape?" Remus asked.

"I'll have to wait until Tonks provides us with her memory, but my suspicions are even stronger now. It's nothing that we'll be able to reveal to anyone or confront him with. Even if we did, I don't think anyone in the Order would believe us especially with Bumbles backing him."

"Harry, I'd still like to know what you have on him as I'm sure Remus does. Can't you tell us?" Ginny asked softly.

Harry looked at both members of his new family and sighed. "Please understand, I want to tell you both and I will but only once your occlumency skills are strong enough. Merlin knows Dumbledore was able to read my mind easy enough before.....well when I was a stupid ignorant....."

"Harry stop it." Ginny interceded, "you couldn't have done anything then and you know it. Stop hating your past self, it doesn't do any good. Besides I liked you then just as much as I love you now. I'm sure Remus will agree with me on that."

"Well strictly speaking it's a different kind of.."

"You know what I mean you foul minded werewolf." Ginny scolded while both Harry and Remus laughed.

"We trust you Harry. Although I'm anxious to find out which side Severus is really serving, I'm willing to wait until that time when we can keep the information safe. Then we can plot what to do with him. Anyway, moving on, what have you found out Ginny?"

"Oh yeah. Well, my egotistical brother and his errant mistress are not as stealthy as they suppose. Numerous students, to include several prefects have spied on them and know they have an invisibility cloak. No one knows where they got it for sure, but they assume it's from the headmaster or someone in the Order of the Phoenix since they haven't kept it secret that they are members." At Harry and Remus' raised eyebrows she continued, "Yes, the students are aware of the Order and some have even made plans to try and sit in on one of the meetings. Seems security is just what we thought it was....lame."

Anyways, Dumbledore has made it pretty obvious where the meetings will take place by using the same room continuously and then announcing that the third floor corridor is off limits to students. All prefects have been given specific orders to ensure no one strays there. Of course this has only served to entice the curiosity of everyone as to what's going on there. As far as I know though, no one has successfully figured out when the meetings are. The headmaster really needs to re-evaluate his view about the intelligence of the students here, he's really underestimating us and putting everyone at risk. Especially knowing that there are students with the Dark Mark burned on them running around. I haven't been able to determine exactly who but I've been warned to watch out for them."

"Ok Gin, good work. Anything else?"

Ginny huffed angrily as if what she just reported wasn't significant. Noticing the angry and put out look on her beautiful face Harry regretted his outburst and apologized asking her to please continue.

Ginny shot a glare at Harry but continued on, ignoring Remus' chuckles. "Well anyway, Ron and Hermione don't stand a chance; they have absolutely no support right now. They've managed to turn the entire student body as well as a few of the professors against them. All you have to do is say the word Harry and they'll be taken care of and you can honestly say you had nothing to do with it."

"It's that bad?" Moony asked surprised at the situation. Harry also had a creased brow.

"It's that bad and worse. The entire Gryffindor Quidditch team is willing to quit because of Ron. It seems that no matter how many detentions or reprimands they receive, they blame it on others and take it out on people in the common room and during team practice. I myself have lodged a few bludgers his way when he wasn't looking. He really is an incompetent git. Hermione has even taken to trying to coach the team from the sidelines and Ron actually supports her. Her and her bloody books, thinking that reading is all it takes and no skill is involved. I've also caught them trying to get in here again on several occasions with no success. Whenever they think we're not

around they have been trying to determine what spell you used on the door to keep people out. They forget about the other Gryffindors that are there watching them. Guess they don't believe the others will tell on them. It seems that Dumbledore is playing both sides thinking he can get away with it. Lavender overheard Dumbledore talking to Ron and Hermione telling them to continue to research our room and find out anything about the three of us even after he publicly told them to stop."

"Well I guess he suspects us after all Harry. What do you want to do about this?"

"Nothing Moony, at least not right now. We won't feed them anything more then we're willing to at this point. We have our plan and we'll stick to it. I know Hermione watches Quidditch practice sometimes using the cloak we can use this to our advantage. We'll let the students further their animosity towards the two and maybe feed that a little but for now it has its own life that is spinning way out of control for those two to handle. It'll carry over to the headmaster soon and then I'll be able to work more to make sure our plans are successful without interference."

"What about us Harry? What are we suppose to do?" Ginny asked concerned and feeling left out of the action.

"Ginny, we've discussed this already, please it's for the best. I need you three to concentrate on training right now. Next weekend we have a lot to discuss if your occlumency is strong enough and I need you all ready by Halloween. I'm counting on you being ready by then."

"I know, but I don't have to like it." She pouted with her lower lip sticking out.

"That's not very becoming of you Gin. You're a strong woman and pouting just doesn't look right."

Ginny smacked Harry on the shoulder knowing the truth of his words.

"See what I mean? So violent all the time." Harry quipped.

“I still don’t like it but at least we have the portkeys. You know they’ll have us move out of here when you leave don’t you?”

“No, I don’t think they’ll do that immediately. Dumbledore will believe I’ve just run off recklessly because of too much emotional baggage and send people to look for me and bring me back. If they can’t find me he’ll believe I’ll still come back when I cool down and come to my senses. He believes this is the only place I’ve considered home and we’ll let him believe that. He refuses to see who I am now which forces him to underestimate me and make bad decisions in his attempts to control me. We’ll let him believe what he wants to our advantage. Besides, once we both take our NEWTs he won’t have anything to say on the matter, our required schooling will be complete. Now tell me about your training, how’s it coming along? Any progress with the animagus training?”

Remus perked up at this like an excited child. “I believe I might have an animagus form! It’s cloudy right now so I can’t tell for sure, but I can feel there’s something there just out of my reach. I’m trying to research the possibilities, but there’s limited information. It’s always been assumed that werewolves don’t have the ability to change, something about the inner wolf not wanting to share its’ territory. I can feel a pull though when I’m meditating, just like the information you passed on said. It’s like I’m being blocked from finding it.”

“Wow, this is exciting Moony. Maybe the werewolf is blocking it from you. Do you mind if I take a look?” Harry asked in giddy anticipation.

“Go ahead Harry I trust you.”

Situating themselves in front of the fireplace on the floor and facing each other, Harry waited until Remus was deep in his trance. Upon entering the werewolves mind it was exactly like Remus had described. The mist was dense but there was something hiding within it. Harry became as excited as Remus and wondered where he could find some information to help his friend. Several theories came to mind but he wanted to research them before presenting them. Retreating from Remus’ mind, Harry waited for Remus to end his trance before saying anything. Ginny sat on the edge of her seat just as anxious as the two men.



Once Remus was awake Ginny couldn't hold it in any longer. "What did you see Harry?"

"It's just like he said Gin. It's amazing, I've never heard of anything similar to this and I can't wait to see what happens. I can't think of anything written on this particular phenomena but I have some theories I want to look into."

"Do you think it has anything to do with the transfer? Maybe its just that no-one tried it before, or maybe the wolfsbane potion has had an unknown side effect for it taking so many years." She rattled on thinking out loud scrunching her nose up in concentration.

Harry studied her face silently and wondered at how truly amazing this young witch was and how lucky he was to have her with him. "I'm not sure Gin, but it's definitely something to look into. Moony I think you need to keep meditating and trying different approaches to draw your form out. Try to have Tonks help you and take as many notes as you can."

Moony nodded his understanding and sat calmly belying the internal struggle he was having in maintaining his excitement. In an attempt to get his mind off the possibilities, he changed to subject to Ginny's form. "So Ginny, tell Harry how you're coming along on your animagus."

"Oh, I'm so excited, I'm going to be a black panther and I've been able to transform my arms and legs so far. Just haven't gotten the full body yet. I think maybe in about a month or so I'll have it down. Then it's just a matter of working on the speed of the transformation and holding it for long lengths of time."

"Gin that's great! I'm proud of you, both of you."

"Oh that reminds me," she said as if not hearing Harry, "I forgot to tell you that McGonagall is secretly training Ron and Hermione to become animagus. They've been using the cloak to go back and forth to her classroom during free periods so no one gets suspicious, although it's common knowledge amongst most of the student body."

I've watched them and they haven't discovered their form yet. It looks like they're having trouble with the meditation. Although it could also be that they're too busy distracting each other with their frequent visits to the broom closets to practice all that much." She finished giggling.

Harry and Remus laughed too, it was infectious. Remus realizing the lateness of the hour called it a night. Ginny and Harry stayed up a little longer before they too decided to get some sleep before their workout in the morning.

Monday morning arrived quickly and Harry sat down to breakfast with Ginny and Neville who started a quiet conversation about the upcoming Halloween Costume Ball. Neville was a little embarrassed to admit that he had asked someone out and that the young lady had accepted. Although he was reluctant to reveal who it was, Ginny eventually coaxed it out of him. Turns out that both Neville and Luna Lovegood had been spending a lot of time together since the incident at the Department of Mysteries and had become quite the couple. Harry was happy for the two and congratulated Neville telling him not to worry about what anyone else said or thought about their relationship. No matter what anyone said, Luna was a fine young lady and as long as they were happy together, that's all that mattered. Neville seemed to puff up a little at this, but before he could say anything they were rudely interrupted by the annoyingly arrogant voice of the youngest male Weasley.

"Well isn't that pathetic....." he sneered as he walked over to them, "at least Longbottom has someone to go with. Guess that ruins you last chance to go Potter." Ron finished smirking viciously like he had just said something ingenious.

Harry ignored him and kept eating knowing that this would irk the short tempered red-head to no end. Ginny and Neville on the other hand looked like they were about to jump the imbecile.

"And just what is that suppose to mean Ron?" Ginny asked bitingly with her eyes blazing with fury. One would think since the two were siblings and grew up together that Ron would recognize the warning signs of an imminent eruption and retreat. Somehow though,

something wasn't firing within the boys head. Harry thought back over the years and realized how bad Ron had become, maybe those brain things did more damage than anyone realized when they attacked him in the Department of Mysteries.

"It means that even Potter's last chance for a date realized how bad it would be to go with him, so she found a way out. I mean really, what would he go as anyway? A Dementor? That's about the closest he could come for a fitting costume with his barmy mood swings and lousy attitude. Had a lot of experience with them haven't you Potter?" Ron sneered laughing at what he thought was a witty statement. When he realized no one else was laughing he looked around to see the angry stares directed at him. Even his girl Hermione wasn't laughing, instead she had her head ducked staring adamantly at her hands folded primly in her lap.

Harry was impressed with her display but didn't dare stand up right now. He could feel the eyes of many in the Great hall focused on him and none more prominently than the headmasters'. Ron still stood flustered behind him not knowing what to say until Neville spoke up and shocked them all.

"Ron why don't you sit back down and eat. You're looking a tad barmy standing there with your mouth moving but no sound coming out. If you're not careful you'll ruin the wonderful reputation you've made for yourself."

Harry nearly choked on his pumpkin juice, but managed to get control without notice. Looking over he saw Ginny's eyes sparkling with suppressed laughter as she too tried to keep it all in. Neville either wasn't really aware of what he had said or had undergone a remarkable change that had gone unnoticed. Harry made a mental note to talk with Neville privately before the week was out.

Ron not knowing what else to say or do to regain control of this conversation, resorted to the only thing he thought he had any power over; Quidditch. "Well you just watch yourself Ginny and don't be late for practice today if you want to play against Slytherin! We only have 2 weeks to get the team up to shape and if your not going to take it seriously then you won't be on the team any longer."

“Is that a threat Ron?” Ginny asked coldly while looking him straight in the eyes daring him to push it further.

“No it’s a promise,” he almost stuttered, “We will beat the Slytherin’s if it’s the last thing I do, even without the Great Harry Potter playing! I hope your proud of yourself Potter! If we loose it will be your entire fault! Too bad you’re not allowed to play! Get that, the Wonderful Golden Boy, the famed Boy-who-lived can’t play Quidditch!” he mocked.

Once again the Great Hall was silent. Harry stood slowly gathering his things before looking Ron straight in the eyes. “There is quite a big difference between being allowed to play and choosing not to Weasley. I have more important things to concentrate on at the moment and I have chosen not to play, no matter what your deluded brain has otherwise convinced itself . Although you have a fair amount of knowledge about the game, that does not automatically give one the skill to be a good player. You might want to think on that. I’ve seen some of your practices, you should listen more to your own advice seeing as you’re the weak link on the team. No matter how hard the rest of the team tries you have to do your part as well. I don’t believe you blocked even one goal during the last practice.”

Ron’s rage was clear as his face flushed a dark red that Harry had never seen before. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Hermione shoot out of her seat making her way towards them. Harry slung his bag over his should and calmly started walking out of the hall.

Ron finally came out of his rage and turned and shouted at Harry, “You’re one to talk mister money can buy me anything. In case you forgot you were kicked off the team and banned for life before your holiday in Azkaban.” He sneered, knowing full well that this would set off the old Harry. “I guess all your galleons won’t help you now Potter. You can’t play Quidditch, you don’t have any friends and you killed off any family that could possibly stand to be around you. I know the truth about you even if no one else sees it!

Harry stopped in his tracks and took several deep breaths, around him there was no sound as all the students and professors were

holding their own breaths not sure how he would respond. To Harry this just confirmed the lack of support and their false claims that they wanted him to forgive them for their past actions. He didn't trust himself to say anything so instead continued to walk out the door. As he passed through he heard Ginny start yelling at her brother like she never had before.

Lucius sat contemplating the letter he had just received from Severus Snape. They were not friends even though they had both served the Dark Lord side by side for many years, for Malfoys' did not have friends. It was a weakness one could ill afford and Malfoys' were not weak. Thinking on the contents of said letter he was mildly concerned. Not for his 'son' so to speak but what impact his son's plotting would have on his masters plans. Like friends, he couldn't become mired in becoming overly concerned about the fate of any relatives including his heir. Even though Draco was his only son, he was still young and could father another heir if needed. Yes this was how Lucius thought however demented and misguided it was.

However, if Draco's petty scheming ruined the Dark Lords plans, it could backfire against him and the Malfoys' would be in danger. No, he could not let his son interfere. Maybe he would have to make his son disappear for a while like his wife. For now though he would see if he could discern exactly what the boy was up to.

Draco was fuming! How dare his father tell him not to get involved! How did he know he was even planning anything? It must be a spy ratting him out to his father, but who? He couldn't afford anything getting in the way of his revenge against that foul half-blood Potter. He would just have to be more careful. Running through a list of his fellow new recruits he found he couldn't trust any of them not to be the spy. 'So this just means I have to do it on my own.' he thought. How hard could it be to get the Weasley girl anyway. Not too hard at all, he convinced himself. She was just a slip of a thing and no one would notice her missing, well except for Potter, and then the Dark Lord would have his prize. He would deliver Potter to his master and be honored above all, even his own father. Even if Potter didn't show, he'd at least deliver the Weasley girl which would be a strike against that blood traitor family and Potter would indirectly be hurt. 'What's the worst master would do anyway, "cruciatu curse? Huh! Father's

performed that curse on me enough over the years that it wouldn't bother me too much. Father was just afraid of being displaced from the Dark Lord's inner circle. I'll show him who is superior! The man's time in Azkaban has obviously made him weak and fearful. No I won't let father interfere in my plans. I won't be swayed by a worthless feeble minded fool. My plans will continue.

Over the next week Harry continued to avoid both Ron and Hermione and waited for the best moment to get his cloak back. Ginny and Remus had both discussed Monday's incident with him. Yes it hurt to see Ron so adamant in his views against him, but he was more disappointed than anything. The more garbage that spilled out of the boy's mouth, convinced Harry that they had never really been friends and that there was no hope they ever would. All he could do was hope Ron would grow up and see the errors of his ways in time. Ginny too was tremendously disappointed in her brother and showed Harry in the pensieve what happened after Harry left. No one did anything as the students sat stunned at the display. Afterwards, the Gryffindor team confided in Ginny that they actually wanted to boycott the upcoming Slytherin game because of Ron. Harry convinced Ginny to talk the team out of it, that they didn't need to get caught in the middle of this fight. Ginny agreed reluctantly.

Remus reported that Tonks was making rapid progress in her training and couldn't wait to see everyone this coming weekend. All three discussed their progress in training and the events happening so far this week. Harry also related Dumbledore's and Snape's continual attempts to read his mind and his entertainment at seeing them frustrated by their lack of understanding of what they were seeing.

"For the greatest wizard of the age and all his manipulations and plots, you would think he would've caught on by now what I've been doing." Harry snickered. Ginny and Remus joined him.

"So what did you show them, don't keep us in the dark!" Remus exclaimed, anxious to hear the stories.

"Well let's see, I've shown Bumbles a lingerie party from the 6th and 7th year Hufflepuff girls,..."

Ginny slapped him playfully on the shoulder. "I'm sure that went over well you pervert."

"Did he say anything about it?" Remus pressed leaning forward in his seat.

"No just had this sappy grim on his face. I wonder when the last time he had any was?" Harry mused aloud.

"Oh that's just nasty! He's what, over 150 years old and he gets his kicks watching young girls flaunt their bodies in skimpy clothes! OOH bad mental pictures! At least you've got an excuse.: Ginny grimaced trying to shake the disturbing thoughts from her mind.

"Let's move on shall we? What else did you do?" Remus said also disgusted.

"Well there was Ernie MacMillan and Colin Creevey snogging in a broom closet, but all he saw was Colin, so I think he may be a little confused."

"I knew it!" Ginny shouted jumping up from her place next to Harry. Harry just looked at her with a raised eyebrow before he continued.

"I think there was a small incident with professor McGonagall in front of a mirror," both Ginny and Remus gulped and scrunched up their faces in disgust at the possible implications. "Before that there were a few others, but I won't get into those. Overall, I believe the headmaster sees me as one really messed up kid. A teenage boy whose hormones have gone haywire after being locked away with Dementors for almost a year. Or, he just thinks I'm a pervert which would be pretty hypocritical on his part, I do say." he shrugged, "Either way he still thinks he has control over me but is focused on trying to eliminate James Roper from the picture. All else is a non-priority to him at this time. He's making a tremendous mistake, one I'm afraid that we'll be cleaning up after." he finished solemnly rubbing his tired face in an effort to relieve some stress.

"You're right Harry, it doesn't matter what he thinks right now. But the fact that he's not focusing on you can only help our plans. So what

about Snape?" Ginny asked causing both Harry and Remus to chuckle at her vindictive nature.

"Well I can't really tell you about that right now. Needless to say, he's seeing some very worrisome ideas that's distracting him from meddling in my affairs."

"Well I guess that would explain his actions of late." Remus replied stroking his chin in thought. "I've noticed he's less enthusiastic than he used to be in dealing with non-Slytherin's. I don't think he's taken any points or given detentions for quite a while."

"True enough, he has other things to worry about right now. Which, ....."Harry said raising a hand to stop any more questions, "I will tell you about hopefully this weekend. Another interesting piece of information that I came across completely by accident is something he's keeping from everybody including his wizened old turkey club. I've been watching Snape and noticed he's been leaving after curfew quite a bit since school started. I overheard Dumbles asking the bat what Voldie was up to that he was being called so often. Seems Snape has been tasked with brewing some secret new potion for Dark Shorts. Quite convenient really that Snape can't even fathom what this potion is supposed to do for the hellish imp. Potions Master my arse!"

"You believe he's lying again Harry?"

"I don't believe anything Moony, I know the man's covering the truth up. We'll play his game for now. The more I learn the clearer it becomes to me how he will be punished." He finished with a wicked grin.

"This is getting really hard Harry. I know that you want us up to speed on occlumency before you tell us anything but it's hard to wait! It's like being told not to peak at Christmas presents before Christmas morning! Who can resist that!"

"Curiosity killed the cat Gin, patience is a virtue, patience can conquer destiny...."



“Enough Harry! Your philosophical meanderings don’t suite you. I....”

At that moment Tonks decided to show up startling everyone. “Wotcher Harry, Remy, Ginny. Decided to take you up on that offer of staying here. Wouldn’t really matter where I stayed really and now that they can’t detect me here I figured what the hell!” she shrugged and made her way to the only seat open within the group.

Harry chuckled at the fact that Tonks didn’t stumble once. Ginny gaped at her then and a calculating smile touched her lips as understanding sparked in her mind. Remus was the most obvious about his thoughts as his smile broadened so wide the others thought his face would crack. His eyes sparkled brightly as he leaned forward in his chair about to stand up. To anyone else it would seem Tonks ignored the smitten man but inside her pulse was racing and she felt as light as air. Giddy in the knowledge that Remus returned her affections she smiled right at him when she sat down.

“So what are we talking about?” She prompted when it became too quiet.

Harry broke out in laughter and the others followed, causing Tonks to frown at their reaction. As soon as Harry regained control he explained what was going on once again and the discussion took off.

Friday night rolled around slowly and still not much else out of the ordinary was happening at Hogwarts. All the talk was about the upcoming Halloween ball and what costumes would best suite certain couples. Hogsmeade would be flooded tomorrow as the students swarmed down to the little village to buy their outfits. Some had ordered ahead by owl, but the majority still couldn’t decide on just the right thing. In preparation for the ball, Hogsmeade had enlisted the aid of solicitors from Diagon Alley and other magical communities to set up small stalls with their wares. The little village had provided a tent all the merchants could set up in to protect everyone from the weather. Needless to say there were more than just costumes being advertised, in all it was promising to be a very festival like gathering.

Tonks, Remus, Ginny and Harry were once again sitting in front of the fire in their suite of rooms. Not much had changed with the arrival

of Tonks, except Remus' overall demeanor. It went unstated that Tonks and Remus would be sharing a room. Tonks was truly amazed at what Harry had accomplished and once she saw what Remus and Ginny could do she worked harder to catch up. No one really missed her so far and for that she was grateful as it gave her more time to work on what had been given her through the transfer. Her occlumency was right on par with the others which wasn't saying all that much since she was a fair occlumens before thanks to Auror training. What had her excited the most was her animagus transformation. Her meditation had paid off when she had found a multi-colored bird soaring through the forest of her mind. Its' vivid red, greens, blues, and yellows captured her attention until it settled peacefully down on her shoulder. In that moment she knew it was a parrot and she couldn't wait to try it out. Granted she knew parrots weren't native to England, but there were enough people both muggle and wizard kind who adored the exotic birds and bought them as pets. The array of colors seemed to fit her personality as well as the nature of the bird. When she told the others, they were excited for her and were anxious to see what she looked like.

Ginny could change into her panther, but couldn't maintain it for too long. Remus felt like he was getting closer to something but was becoming frustrated. On one hand he had lived his entire adult life knowing he would never become an animagus, the curse that had been inflicted upon him when he was a young boy destroyed that. The wolf was too strong to allow any other to enter its' domain. How he hated the wolf at times. Over the years though he had come to terms with it, knowing there was nothing he could do except prevent himself from inflicting this wretched curse upon another. On the other hand, he felt a strong presence when he meditated which suggested that he just might have an animagus form which in turn made him question his fundamental beliefs. Was it the wolf blocking this form if there was one? Why hadn't he felt it earlier when he had practiced with the marauders? The transfer that Harry had performed gave them immense knowledge but not any extra magical abilities. It was more that he had provided them a means through which they could enhance their own magical talents. Was this something that every witch or wizard had but just didn't have the knowledge to access those gifts? He hoped it didn't all depend on the amount of magic one contained, if it did he was disheartened he would ever achieve his

aim. Before he could really think on it more, Harry jumped out of his seat causing Ginny to fall off the couch in his exuberance. She glared at his back causing Tonks and Remus to break out chuckling.

“Moony! What exactly have you been searching for when you meditate?”

“What do you mean Harry? I don’t think I’ve been searching for anything but my form.”

“Yes, but what form have you been looking for?”

“Harry what are you talking about? You don’t search for a specific form, it comes to you.” Ginny injected confused as to what Harry was going on about.

“You’re right Ginny, but please just listen and think about what I’m saying. Moony think about it. What are you trying to become.....or not become.” He finished quietly but staring straight at the werewolf.

Ginny and Tonks sucked in their breaths and Remus looked between all three trying to figure of the significance. He thought back over his meditations and sought for what he had been thinking. Through all of it, there was only one constant and that was being something besides the wolf. Relaying this to the others, he wasn’t expecting the answer he got.

“Don’t you see Remus? All those many years you’ve convinced yourself that you have come to terms with the wolf inside you, but you really haven’t. you haven’t accepted him. You fight against what you perceive as evil, but you are forcing that evil into being every time you fight the change.”

“Harry you’re not making any sense.” Remus stated exasperated. “I’ve lived with this curse most of my life and the only thing that’s kept me sane is believing I’m not evil and of course the wolfsbane. Before I came to Hogwarts and had friends and people who actually cared, I lived in hell. I was always fearful of someone finding out what I was. My parents did everything they could to help, but even they knew that I had to constantly fight the beast inside me. Do you know what it’s

like to be afraid that I might pass this curse on to someone? To look into the eyes of the ones you love and see fear there? They try to hide it but the wolf can sense it. I have to keep fight it!" he stated solemnly as if it was a mantra.

"Remus, I know very well of what you speak, but you don't understand. You're entire life you have programmed yourself to believe the very biased views of which you fight against. You need to understand what it is that you are. Look if anything else it's something different to try. All this time you've been searching for a cure with no success. What if you don't need a cure? All I'm suggesting is that when you meditate, attempt to talk to the wolf inside. See what happens. It can't be any worse than what you're already going through. We'll be her for you no matter what happens." Harry urged. Ginny and Tonks nodded encouragingly, hope shining bright in their eyes.

Remus thought about it and although he had serious doubts he was almost willing to try anything at this point. Harry had done so much just by believing he could and given him a lot in the past few months. He had no reason to doubt the young man, but he was afraid. It was bred into him for too many years. Looking around at those he cared for most in the life, he saw the silent plea for him to try this. The support and determination was also there. When he looked at Tonks, her eyes locked with his and through all the other emotions that danced through them he saw love. That one emotion knocked away the fear, if he wanted any semblance of a normal life with her, he had to try it. He knew unless he found some way to cure the lycanthropy or at least find a way to control it and not let it hurt anyone, he would never get seriously involved with anyone let alone Tonks. He wasn't a brave man even though he was sorted into Gryffindor. He had too many fears which blocked acting bold, but yet he was still a Gryffindor. Somehow there was something that placed him there. This always caused him no end of consternation trying to figure out why exactly he had been put there. Ravenclaw would have fit him better, even Hufflepuff would've been a better fit, but then he would have never met the Marauders and become friends, he would have never been part of a family, this family. Once again weighing the pros and cons, Remus let out a defeated sigh and slumped forward in his chair resting his head in his hands.

"Alright I'll try it, but you have to promise me that you'll be there when I do this. I'm not too certain what I'll find and I don't want anyone hurt. You're the only ones I know that have a chance at restraining me if I lose control."

"Great!" Ginny exclaimed and jumped out of her seat to stand beside her older friend. Placing a hand on his shoulder in a sign of support she said, "We'll all be there for you. Let's set up a schedule for this so we can work it into what we already have."

"Good idea Ginny," Tonks stated as she knelt down next to the worried man she loved. "Remus, you know I'll always be here for you. I have a good feeling about this. I don't know how to explain it, but it just feels right somehow."

Remus looked up into her face and smiled wanly, "I hope your right."

"OK, let's get this started. We've already proved false the idea that metamorphs can't be animagus. So why not scrap another!" Ginny declared excitedly clapping her hands together in anticipation.

Remus started and then a grin spread over his face. It was true enough. Tonks had lived her entire life believing she couldn't be an animagus, but she was about to prove that wrong so why couldn't he? With renewed hope and determination he jumped into the planning, looking forward to what may happen.

The next day while everyone was enjoying the Hogsmeade fair, as it was becoming known as, the foursome trained. Harry evaluated their occlumency and found it acceptable. Meaning they would have no trouble keeping Dumbledore and Snape or even Voldemort out of their minds. Granted it would be obvious that they were blocking the Legilimens curse, but with more practice they would hone that too. After the rigorous testing, Harry brought them into his trunk and told them everything that happened and would be happening. Shock was a very inaccurate term to describe what they felt and Harry realized this as Tonks, Ginny and Remus sat in stunned silence for almost an hour staring blankly ahead trying to absorb it all.

Ginny was the first to recover, but only turned to stare at Harry with awe and respect. Harry was a little unnerved by this until she broke into a smile and launched herself into his arms giggling hysterically. Confused and frustrated, Harry just held her hoping that she wasn't reverting to her old self, until both Remus and Tonks snapped out of it. They both wore the same silly grins that Ginny had. They looked at Harry then each other and stood up quickly to hug each other. What really threw Harry for a loop was when they started dancing around the room while Ginny continued to giggle helplessly.

Harry coughed loudly to get their attention but it didn't work. Ginny however stopped her giggling and reached out pulling Harry's face down to hers. Before he knew it he was locked into a passionate and wildly exciting kiss with the woman he loved sending his heart soaring and his blood racing. He wanted it to last forever but unfortunately they both needed air and Ginny pulled back smiling brightly at him. "We're going to win Harry!" she whispered fiercely.

Harry finally understood and he reveled in the moment forgetting everything else. "Yes we are." He replied with the same smile and his eyes shining brightly before he leaned over and captured those enticing lips swimming before him once again.

Over the next week the four picked up their training with a new vigor, eager to finally participate in the upcoming battles. Not even the snide comments or nasty looks could dissuade them. Even Harry's normal melancholy act slipped a bit, confusing all around him, but it was easily explained by the upcoming events at the school. They knew others were suspicious but they wouldn't do anything about it.

The only down point was Ron and Quidditch practice. Ginny had already received a detention for punching her brother during practice when his constant belittling and demeaning comments had forced her beyond her limits which as exceedingly difficult these days. The team had backed her, but Hermione had stepped in backing Ron and that's all it took with their head of house.

Wednesday was another little surprise that went unnoticed by the entire school except for 5 people. Amidst the bustle of the morning

delivery owls, a rather regal black eagle hawk made its way towards the Slytherin table dropping it's bounty in front of the blonde prince of Slytherin. Malfoy's only external reaction to the post was a slight widening of his eyes in recognition. Flippantly he opened the letter and began reading. When he was done he burned it and left the Great Hall with no one the wiser.

Snape on the other hand was skeptical. He had written Lucius again stating his concern that Draco seemed to be unconvinced to cease whatever plans he had in motion. The fact that the boy was a skilled occlumens did nothing to assist Snape in discovering exactly what the arrogant child was up to. Lucius had written back saying he would contain the situation and didn't want the Dark Lord informed. Severus had to agree with that. The Dark Lord was unstable these days and he didn't want his godson harmed if there was any way to avoid it. Lucius knew what he was doing when it came to his son, he would have to trust the man. At least that's what Severus convinced himself so he would continue to watch as he normally did and keep his friend informed. He failed in his duties however, when he didn't follow Draco and his friends leaving dinner early that night.

Although night time wanderings on the grounds were discouraged, they were not forbidden. Only the dark forest was forbidden but that would matter anymore. Draco, Pansy Parkinson and Theodore Nott marched quickly and quietly through the shadows entering where others feared to tread keeping cautious watch on their surroundings. Following the directions Draco had been given earlier they soon came upon the clearing they were to meet at. All three were expecting orders and were excited at being able to finally serve their Lord and prove to those insignificant filthy mudbloods lovers and blood traitors how powerful they were. Draco was honored yes, but he was also miffed that his own plans would now have to be halted until his latest mission was accomplished. He would not refuse his master anything and his own ambitions would have to wait.

Waiting quietly in the clearing they heard a branch snap and all 3 swiveled fast towards the direction it came from, pointing their wands into the darkness hoping to catch whoever it was. They were mistaken. All three screamed loudly when a deep malicious voice greeted them from behind.

Once again they spun as one to face the person. Not all were very graceful as Pansy tripped over her own feet and fell face down onto the forest floor. No one moved to aid her and she huffed at out her indignation. Standing quickly she looked up into the sneering ice cold eyes of Lucius Malfoy, her future father-in-law. Shamed beyond belief to have been humiliated so much in front of this man, she turned beat red and hung her head while at the same time trying to unsuccessfully fix her disheveled appearance.

Draco chanced a sideways glance at her and stiffed disdainfully which was not lost on Pansy.

“Our Master deems you worthy of joining his ranks,” Lucius sneered eyeing the three critically. “Why I do not know, but it is not my place. You are to take this portkey and upon arrival you will be given further instructions. Do not fail, disobedience will be punished severely. This is your only chance to prove yourself worthy in receiving the mark of the greatest wizard of all time. If you refuse you will die.” Thrusting a corroded silver goblet towards the three he dropped it and spun around disappearing without any further directions.

Nott levitated the goblet towards them. “On the count of three then....” He suggested eyeing the others. The nodded in return and Draco began the count. On one they touched the goblet and disappeared.

Later that night after making his rounds, professor Snape returned to the Slytherin dormitories to check the students as he always did. Everyone was where they were supposed to be except for 3 of his more elusive seventh years. Cursing himself as a fool he ran immediately up to the headmasters office to inform him of the missing teens. He cursed Draco for the arrogant fool he was thinking he was acting on his own, but then thought that maybe this was what Lucius was referring to in his letters. Stopping himself before saying the password, he weighed both side and decided he would wait to learn more. If the students returned by morning he would have a little chat with them. No one knew he checked on his house every night not even the Slytherin’s themselves so it wouldn’t be too hard to hide that he knew they were gone. He would wait for Lucius to contact him,



anything else would be too suspicious. Firming his decision he turned and walked to his quarters looking forward to a nice quiet evening with a glass of his favorite brandy.

Thursday morning arrived and with it the normal influx of owl post. Everything seemed normal until three owls dropped letters in front of the headmaster. The surprise the old wizard felt was quickly hidden as he surveyed the post in front of him. Carefully unfolding the parchment he read through each of them, brow furrowing further with each one. Why would three of his students decide to withdraw from Hogwarts in their last year to transfer to Durmstrang? Even more worrisome, was that the parents of said student had already completed the process and received proper authorization from the respective ministries and school boards which were attached to each letter. It was extremely rare, but not unheard of to transfer schools, but due to many factors most wizards and witches completed their education in the school they had started. Noting that all the students were from Slytherin house, he became suspicious and scrutinized the documents closely, but couldn't find anything out of place with the required charms and spells on the documents that proved them genuine. He was angry that he had no warning that this would happen and turned to study his potion master who was eating as stoically as ever and couldn't discern anything amiss. In fact it didn't appear as though the young professor even noticed that 3 members of his house were not at breakfast this morning. Deciding this was not the place for conversation he spoke up gaining the attention of the man he had been studying. "Severus you have first lesson free, do you not?"

Severus placed his fork down primly then proceeded to daintily wipe his mouth before answering. "That is correct headmaster. May I assume you need to speak with me about something?"

"Yes, Severus, please meet me in my office when you are finished here."

"As you wish headmaster." Severus replied and calmly went back to eating his meal.

Dumbledore stared out the window overlooking the grounds from his office trying to unravel the mystery as to why three seventh year Slytherin's would want to transfer schools. His meeting with Severus had been unenlightening as he seemed just as surprised as himself they were gone. When the question of whether they had left to join Voldemort was asked quite bluntly, the Slytherin head of house denied knowing anything about them being initiated into the Death Eater ranks. There had been no news of any upcoming Revels or initiations as of yet. With a quick legilimency scan the headmaster was able to confirm that Severus knew nothing about his students. The aged wizard knew that legilimency wasn't enough to reveal the total truth from the master occlumens, but he trusted the man enough not to pry any further. He had trained the boy himself and knew the ability Severus maintained. In fact it rivaled the two most powerful occlumens of the age, himself and the self proclaimed Lord Voldemort. He had so far been able to thwart the attempts of the Dark Lord over the many years in his service and brought back useful information he had gained as a spy for the Order of the Phoenix. It never occurred to Dumbledore that the very ability he had trained the spy in could or would be used against him and the order.

He sighed sadly knowing another three lives had been lost to the dark, for he truly believed that the transfer was only a ruse to disguise their involvement in the nefarious plans of Voldemort and his Death Eaters. He only hoped the letters he had sent to their parents would make a difference and bring them back to the light. He couldn't have guessed nor even come close to even thinking that his letters would never reach their intended recipients.

His thought turned to another troubled student and he wondered if the boy would ever come out of his shell. He felt sorry for the boy, certainly, but he had by far surpassed all the trials set before him except this last one. Although he felt bad for having to put the boy through it all, he knew it was necessary if the wizarding world were to survive. Vowing to work more diligently with the boy and bring him back into the fold, he sank further into thought.

As classes let out for the day, Harry met up with Ginny making their way down to the Quidditch pitch. Hearing so many stories about the horrendous practices bothered Harry. He also didn't want the team to

have to forfeit the match in order to get back at Weasley, as it would only cause them to suffer more. There was also the added benefit that it would irk his former friend to no end seeing him watch the ill fated practice session. He only hoped the other half to the disastrous duo turned up.

Arriving early, Harry and Ginny sat in the stands talking and joking around until the others arrived. Ron glared at Harry but didn't approach.

"It seems our dear Ronald has been forewarned." Harry whispered in Ginny's ear causing her to shudder at the touch of his warm breath. She stifled a chuckle and winked at him before leaving to join the team. Harry stood to find a better seat to watch from and innocently sat down near the invisible Hermione, who in fact had spotted Harry and Ginny walking out earlier and warned Ron. She had arrived not soon after them under cover of an invisibility cloak hoping to get some information out of them. But to her consternation they only talked of non-sensical things. Harry laughed a couple times and she felt a pang in her chest to seem him acting similar to his old self. It was still a bit reserved and it wasn't with her and Ron, but it still hurt to see him with someone else and knowing that she would never be able to be like that with Harry anymore.

She never expected Harry to move after Ginny had left, so she froze still when Harry sat on the bench down from her. Her breathing quickened and she struggled to keep it under control. Her heart seemed to be thumping loudly in her chest and she could only hope that Harry couldn't hear it. She was going to crack if he found her using his cloak after lying about having it. To Hermione the practice seemed to be in some sort of spiteful time-warp slowing things down to a snails pace. She was starting to become frantic from holding still so long. If she moved he would hear her, but her heavy breathing would surely give her away before she could move if she didn't get it under control.

Harry smirked at the feelings Hermione was unintentionally radiating through her magic as her fear and anxiety increased with every passing second. He cheered the team on when they succeeded in performing some difficult maneuvers and watched disapprovingly as

Ron berated them that it should have been done better. Ginny flew by winking and waving at him which he returned shouting out his encouragement despite the verbal harangues coming from Ron. From the peripheral of his vision he noticed a rider flying quickly towards him and he knew immediately that it was the red headed frenzied team captain himself. Ignoring him for now he concentrated on watching the others intent on turning this situation to his benefit.

Ginny had slowed her flight and was eyeing her brother intently. To inflame the situation Harry called out some more words of support to the other team members while Ron landed and stalked over to him. Ginny began to fly over to join them.

“What do you think you’re doing her Potter?” Ron asked angrily.

Harry acted surprised that there was someone there next to him and jumped up to face the boy, conveniently landing closing to Hermione but between her and Ron. “Oi, didn’t see you there. Ginny asked me to come watch and since I didn’t have anything to do I figured why not? The teams looking pretty good.” He commented off hand.

“What would you know about it? You can’t play, you never knew much about the intricacies of the game anyway. Always a loner Potter. You’ve never cared about anyone other than yourself so why pretend now? You’re not wanted here so leave!”

Harry’s eyes hardened dangerously, Ginny landed below him and made her way up, he could feel Hermione taking advantage of the distractions to move closer to his back. “I didn’t know it was a closed practice and since I was invited by a team member it proves I am wanted here. I don’t think I’ll leave just yet, unless your practice is finished and my friends are free.” He said nearly growling.

“I don’t care what you have to say. I’m the captain and I’m banning you from the Quidditch pitch now leave!”

Other team members were starting to gather around them wondering what all the shouting was about.

“You don’t have the authority, nor do you have any reason to ban me Weasley. I’d think twice about what you are saying.”

“Are you threatening me? Well, we’ll just see about that! You’ve been a pain in my side for far too long. The great Harry Potter, the boy-who-lived, you always get what you want, and I’m sick of the way everyone always gives in to you. Not anymore!” Ron shouted.

Harry saw it coming, was hoping for it actually and ducked at the last second. Ron’s fist missed the black haired teen but to his shock and horror still connected hard to something behind Harry. A small shriek of pain, a thud and then silence followed as everyone stared dumbly at two primly stockinged feet that had appeared out of no where. Harry jerked his head to Ginny who smiled evilly as she walked over to the unconscious victims of Ron’s wrath. Squatting down she examined the scene then reached over and pulled off a silky glittering substance revealing none other than Hermione Granger, resident know-it-all, with a darkening bruise appearing on her cheek.

“Well what do we have here?” Ginny cooed.

“Hermione!” Ron shouted as he jumped to her side trying to shake her awake. “This is all your fault Potter!”

“No Ron, I believe this one lies solely on your head.” Ginny rebutted.

“How’d she do that?”

“What happened.....Why’d he hit her?” were some of the many questions floating around as the team came out of their silence.

Harry tried valiantly to keep his humor of the situation disguised as he reached out for the item in Ginny’s hands. For a moment their eyes locked and they could read each others thoughts. This wasn’t their plan, but it was even better. Harry quickly pulled the cloak out of her hands and located the neckline where he knew his father’s name was stitched into it. The whole time feigning a baffled look. Before anyone could react he exclaimed in shock, “Hey this is my invisibility cloak! I thought you both said you didn’t know where it was?”

Ginny glared daggers at her bother daring him to lie. She could tell he was at a loss as to how to respond without the help of his studious girlfriend who still remained unconscious.

The Gryffindor team looked on oblivious to the ramifications, but were hoping the disastrous duo were about to get a good tongue lashing.

Hermione stirred distracting Rons' attention from everyone.

"MIONE! Oh Merlin, I'm sorry!" he whined. He lifted her up and rested her head against his chest continuing to babble.

Harry didn't want to give the wakening girl a chance to explain. "I can't believe you two! You keep saying you want to be my friends, that you want everything to go back to the way it was before, but the way you're acting and the things you've said prove beyond a doubt quite the opposite. This just takes the cake. You've lied to me, blamed and berated me and I find you with the one possession I know wasn't destroyed before.....It was obviously too useful for the crazy old bastard and you two continually play into his hands. I wonder.....have you been hiding Hedwig on me too?"

By Ron's flinch he knew his ex-friend knew something about his faithful owl. He did a quick scan and found that although Ron didn't do anything to Hedwig, he knew Dumbledore or the Order did. Fuming, he angrily walked back to the castle intent on demanding what the fool knew about his owl. Ginny followed quickly trying to catch up with him. She too was furious and wanted answers and wouldn't stop Harry from getting them. It seemed their plans were about to move up on the time-table. Behind her she could hear the rest of the team following, whispering amongst themselves, and probably trying to figure out what was going on.

Harry strode up to the front table where the professors were just sitting down for dinner. Just as he reached the head table a commotion broke out behind him and he turned to see what it was. It was a mistake, but he wasn't about to get distracted by the frantic red head racing up the hall trying to carry the woozy brainiac. "Don't believe him headmaster, he's lying! He stole Hermione's cloak and punched her. I think he actually broke her nose. I stopped the

bleeding, but Potter took off before I could properly administer punishment.”

Gasps broke out throughout the hall at this revelation but the one's coming from the Gryffindor Quidditch team were gasps of outrage at the outright lie Ron so blatantly told. It was no wonder he'd risk it, seeing as though lately he could do no wrong in the eyes of their head of house and the headmaster.

Shouting broke out amongst the team and quickly traveled to the rest of the students. Harry and Ginny stood silently fuming. Remus watched on curious as to how this would end, but he had a sneaking suspicion that things just moved forward in their plan.

Dumbledore stood from his seat and shouted, “SILENCE!”

After all had quieted down McGonagall spoke up. “Mr. Potter I am ashamed at your outlandish behavior! That will cost you a weeks worth of detentions and 50 points from Gryffindor. Now return the cloak to Miss Granger.”

The Slytherin's cheered and the Gryffindors groaned, the Quidditch team started shouting again. Once again Dumbledore shouted for everyone to be quiet, and again before he could speak Harry spoke up.

“Professor, I was not the one that hit Miss Granger. In fact it was Mr. Weasley that did the deed and I have plenty of witnesses to attest to that fact. As for the cloak, it is mine which can also be proven as my fathers' name is sewn into the neckline. It's ironic really that after all the times I've asked for it, it shows up with one of these two, long after everyone has stated they had no idea where it was! Now I want to know what has happened to Hedwig. I shouldn't have believed you about my cloak and I damned well am not going to believe you about Hedwig. Where is she!”

“You are out of line Mr. Potter. I have no idea what so ever as to what happened to your owl. How dare you accuse a professor of such.....” McGonagall answered outraged at being accused of some dastardly deed.

"Maybe you should think about how it feels professor! You just accused me of something on his word!" he said pointing directly to Ron. "You never asked me my side of the story or even anyone else's. See a pattern here? Now, I will not stand for punishments so unjustly given. Mr. Weasley stole my property and I have rightfully regained them. I want the rest of my things returned to me immediately!"

"He's lying! I saw him in the stands threatening her and flew down to stop him." Ron injected.

"Oh now that's just it!" Ginny shouted furious at the lies spewing from her brothers mouth and pissed beyond belief that Dumbledore hadn't spoken up yet. The man was a master legilimens and could plainly see the boy was lying his head off. "You lying piece of dragon dung! The entire Quidditch team saw exactly what happened! Harry was doing nothing but encouraging us while you continually berated us. You just flew down and started yelling at him for being there and had the audacity to threaten him. Then you tried to hit him, he ducked and your fist miraculously found Hermione's face. None of even knew she was there because she was hiding under HARRY'S invisibility cloak! You can ask anyone that was there!" she finished waving at the gaggle of people standing together behind her who all nodded their heads furiously in agreement.

McGonagall sighed in resignation and shot the headmaster a look. Seeing no support there she reluctantly cancelled Harry's punishment and gave a weeks worth of detentions to Ron who huffed at the perceived injustice.

Dumbledore spoke up then. "Now that that is all resolved, I am afraid Harry, that I am going to have to confiscate your cloak. It will be returned to you at the end of the school year." He said as if that was the end to it.

"I disagree sir and refuse to hand over my rightful property. It was my fathers' and one of the last things I have of him that wasn't destroyed. I will not have you confiscate it only to be returned to these.....people or any others that might again use it against me, and I demand to know what happened to Hedwig!"



“Harry I will not allow you.....”

“You have no say in this headmaster, it is my rightful property. I have warned you repeatedly not to interfere with me and you still have yet to take me seriously. If you are not willing to work with me, I will not offer my aid to you. My promise from this summer still stands. I can and will leave this school if you don’t back off.”

“Mr. Potter, you are wrong in your assumptions. You will not be able to leave this school unless you are expelled for good reason or you have passed your NEWTs. While you are here you are required to obey the rules set forth like all the other students. I do not wish to be at odds with you, but you continually flaunt your rule breaking which I cannot tolerate any longer. Now, your cloak Mr. Potter!” he finished, eyes twinkling madly while reaching out for the requested item. I he though Harry would roll over for him he was badly mistaken.

Harry couldn’t believe this man. He really couldn’t handle not being in control of things. Then it hit him, the old man wasn’t all there. Sure they had joked about it often enough in the past, but to actually realize it. Dumbledore really didn’t believe in all the bull he professed, there was no such thing as the next great adventure. The man was afraid of becoming useless in his old age but couldn’t let it go. All of a sudden he seemed weak and desperate. He wasn’t sure of his place in the world and was fighting to keep what he knew and understood alive. For the first time Harry felt pity for the once all powerful wizard before him, but he couldn’t let that interfere. He would deal with it after Voldemort was taken care of. For now he could not and would not back down.

“You are wrong headmaster. I also know the law. You cannot so easily keep me in the dark as you once did. I am not the boy you thought you knew. I have many options open to me which I can and will take advantage of if needs be. There is also nothing that states my personal property may be confiscated as it does not directly endanger any of the faculty or students. If you want to expel me for refusing to let you control me and follow you blindly like the rest of the world then do so and reap the outcome. It will not effect me either way. As you once said it’s our choices that define who we are. We all

have choices to make headmaster, one is before you now. I hope that you will not regret the one you make.”

“Why you arrogant, self absorbed....you....you.....”

“You sound like a broken record professor Snape. Oh sorry, guess you wouldn’t know what that is. Do you ever come up with anything new? Didn’t think so since you’re still wallowing in a past that’s long dead and gone. By the way, heard anything new from your watchers from the board?”

“How dare you! 100 points from Gryffindor for your lack of respect. Headmaster I must insist.....”

“That’s enough Severus. If you continue to refuse Mr. Potter, I will have to punish you.”

“And if I refuse to submit to you ‘punishment’?”

Everyone looked on nervously and in awe of the intense conversation taking place. No one ever fathomed anyone had enough courage to so openly challenge the greatest wizard of the age, let alone a boy who had yet to finish his education. Not only that but he was taking on the stern head of Gryffindor house and the terrifying head of Slytherin as well. Then again, Harry Potter never fell into the normal bounds of teenage life.

“50 points Mr. Potter for your.....”

“Take all the points you want professors, they don’t mean anything in the long run. What are points or a stupid trophy when your life and beliefs are on the line. What are points compared to the loss of a loved one. What worth do points have when your students have left these hallowed halls but have not been prepared to survive what awaits them on the outside? Tell me professors, what possible reward can the promise of more points ever compare to living a life without the fear of someone coming along and destroying everything you hold dear just because they don’t agree with you, or for fear you may have something they don’t. No Professor McGonagall, every time you take or give points you prove my point. It’s quite hypocritical

really. You're only taking points because you mistakenly think it will curb my attitude, but you fail to notice I don't give a damn and the only people you are hurting are yourselves and the students of this school. By all means continue, but once again I will not be controlled, I am not your weapon, and I will not tolerate anymore false allegations. My solicitors are fully aware of everything that goes on here and there will be repercussions. If I don't see Hedwig returned to me within 24 hours you will rue the day I ever returned to this school." He finished and turned to walk out.

"Snapes right about you Potter!" Ron shouted, the hot head just couldn't keep his mouth shut, couldn't leave well enough alone. It definitely must have something to do with those brains, no one could regress in maturity so quickly. "You're life's been handed to you on a silver platter but that isn't good enough for you is it? You have to take away everything anyone else holds dear! What have you ever lost! I hate you! "

He didn't turn around but said in a cold hard voice, "What have I lost Ron? No matter what I say you will never understand what I have lost. You think my life has been easy have you? Well let's see shall we?" Through his mental link he warned Remus, Tonks and Ginny to shield their mind then waved his hand and the room was frozen, no one could move. It felt eerily familiar to a few present but before their minds could process that thought the visions began.

Dark figures with white masks encircled a family of 5 laughing evilly while casting curse after curse at the unarmed victims. Unbearable screams rang out through the night as blood and gore splashed on the ground around them.

A burning house lit up the night, the Dark Mark hovering in the sky above. Bodies on fire crashed wildly around trying to find an exit. One found their way out the front door only to be cut down ruthlessly by the waiting Death Eaters.

A teenage girl, face marred by tears, blood and dirt, lay pinned to the ground by a black robed figure. Her frantic screams and weak struggles ignored by those around as the man tore off her clothes and

proceeded to brutally rape her. Her death was slow and painful as each of the robed figures took their turn.

An elderly man lay immobile on the ground, silent tears streamed down his broken face as he watched his wife beaten, raped and savagely cut open and torn apart. His only solace being he would soon join her.

Numerous visions of barbaric rituals and mass murder flashed in their minds. The blood flowed like a river encompassing everything and the screams came unbidden. It would be something they would all remember until their dying days. As suddenly as they started, they stopped, but still none could move.

For some the visions then started again, scenes of a childhood of horror that left them bereft. The life of Harry Potter continued sparing not a single horror the Dursley's had inflicted. All the emotions swamped their unprepared minds as they witnessed unmitigated abuse and neglect. When the boy's Hogwarts years came they felt the pure joy Harry felt at finally escaping and the hope that things would be different only to have it all come crashing down around him. Year after year they witnessed, seeing the boy abused during the summer, build up hope to return to school then be torn apart as friends, professors, peers, and the ministry lauded then vilified the boy-who-lived until the last betrayal. The felt the cold despair and desolation induced by the Dementors of Azkaban as he relived the horrors of his short life. The torturous screams of the boy as he was forced to witness to all Voldemort and his minions actions, helpless to fight against it.

As the scenes fades, they were once again reminded of their own duplicity and hypocrisy. They had sworn never again to fail the boy and to stand by him, but yet they hadn't. They saw the savoir of the wizarding world only and as most people do, demanded he step up and save them instead of seeing the young man he was. They had failed him yet again, it wouldn't be their last mistake, for they would come to regret their actions for the rest of their lives.

Once control was returned, not one person in the Great Hall was immune from becoming sick at what they had scene. It was a nasty

sight and took quite some time to sort out, but for three individuals who had managed to block the worst of the attack. Before anyone noticed Ginny, Remus and Tonks escaped the disgusting hall in search of Harry.

A/N: Ok sorry everyone this has taken me forever to update. Hard chapter to write since it's leading up to the big stuff. Hope it doesn't bore you all. Thanks for all your reviews and looking forward to reading more. Hope this starts answering some of the questions some had about Hedwig, no I didn't want to kill her off, but didn't want her showing up out of no-where at the beginning. Yes someone is keeping her you'll see next chapter. Think anyone's had a wake up call yet? No I'm dragging it out a bit but oh well, my story. Thanks again.

Meurysan

## Chapter 21—Everything Starts to Fall Apart

Dumbledore paced his office pondering the latest development. After the scene in the Great Hall, Harry had fled and no one could find him. He couldn't fathom where Harry could possibly be hiding and it frustrated him to no end. The boy had eluded his efforts over the summer as well and he could not get any specific information of his whereabouts during their lessons.

The other thing that bothered him was that he had shown an enormous amount of power and control in using spells which he had been previously incapable of wielding. When he had been frozen with everyone else, he immediately remembered a similar situation not too long ago when James Roper had done the same thing in the Ministry. He feared that somehow Harry had taken up with the man, and was being influenced to use dark magic as he was sure that Roper was not what he seemed. This was a scenario that he did not want to contemplate. Things were on the edge as it was and they couldn't afford the outside influence that Roper was providing. Sending Harry to Azkaban had been a terrible mistake, having pushed the boy past his breaking point making it harder to reign him back in.

In lessons with the boy, he had not been able to extract any information revealing where the boy had been hiding or how he had come about the knowledge he possessed. Truly he feared for the boys' sanity with what he had seen in the teen's mind. Sure there were normal thoughts any teenage boy would have, but there were more disturbing things as well. He had been able to see more than he ever thought possible without a pensieve and it worried him that Harry's mind was so easy to read. Throughout all these lessons though, he had not seen what Harry had shown them all this morning and it shocked him thoroughly that the boy had been so abused. The Dursley's were not very likeable people, but they didn't seem so terrible as to treat their nephew the way they did. Tom Riddle's early years were too similar and that was cause for more concern when taken in context with Harry's actions of late. He felt a little sorrow at his involvement in forcing such a life on a young innocent child that was so adored by his parents, but it was done in the interest of saving the wizarding world. They needed their savior to be tough and ready to stand up and fight for those that couldn't, Harry had been just that

before Azkaban. The boy had proven he could overcome misfortune and be the better for it. Now he wasn't so sure he hadn't created another Dark Lord.

His mind was racing with ways to get the boy back under control and the only things he could come up with would be very risky to pull off for all of the options involved border line Dark Magic that would bind Harry to him. Dark Magic was not a sure thing as Dumbledore knew very well. If one was not absolutely certain in committing to the rituals and their outcomes, it could backfire on the caster severely. The recipient of the rituals was also a precarious risk factor, for if their power was greater than the caster they could easily reverse the ritual onto the caster. If their power was too weak, they could be easily killed by the ritual. Dumbledore was pretty sure of Harry's power, but would still need to cast a detection spell on him once back in his custody. This line of thought brought him back to the immediate predicament, how to get Harry back!

The teaching staff had been of little use, as they were all still too afflicted by what they had seen. The realities of Harry's life had hit them hard and they felt guilty for not seeing it or helping him in some way. Add to this their conviction that Harry's sentencing was just, further enhanced their melancholy state. All had assisted in searching the castle but they had done so half-heartedly, not sure if it was the right way to help the boy.

To make matters worse, Remus had also disappeared and couldn't be contacted, and Severus was called away by his Dark Mark. The two people who could provide him with the most information were not available and it was stressing what little control he had left, and the Order members he had called for a meeting seemed to be taking an inordinate amount of time to arrive.

As Tonks, Remus and Ginny arrived back in their suite, they found Harry disassembling the wards and knew immediately what was happening. Everyone quickly started packing their things and were ready by the time the last ward fell.

"Ready?" Harry asked as he saw everyone standing near. At their nods he disappeared, reappearing at the Shrieking Shack and

summoned a bottle of Firewhiskey and four glasses. He poured himself a glass and sat waiting for the others to arrive via their special portkeys. No sooner had he taken his first sip, than the three appeared. Silently they settled their things and sat down to join him.

"Well, sorry about all that but even I have my limits." He greeted and tossed back the rest of his drink. "Don't believe they'll ever learn, it's like trying to punch a stone wall, it just won't budge."

"I happen to agree with you cub. I'm Afraid they don't really see what's coming, and with Dumbledore keeping everyone on a limited, need-to-know status, well it just makes the possibilities for mistakes even greater."

"But we can't afford their mistakes right now? Doesn't he realize what he's doing?" Ginny angrily whispered. "Now they'll just spend all their efforts and resourced looking for us when they should be preparing for Voldemorts next attack."

"You're right Gin. Right now I believe Dumbledore is calling a meeting of the Order to do just that. Tonks, you should be able to still go."

"Sure thing Harry. What do you want me to tell everyone?"

"Just say you ran after Remus who went looking for me, hoping he would lead you to me, but you lost him when he took an untraceable portkey. They'll already assume he's with me somewhere. As for Ginny, well..." he said a little unsure to state what he was thinking, "I hate to say it, but I doubt they'll they'll notice her missing yet with all the commotion of trying to find me." He shot Ginny an apologetic glance hoping she wouldn't get too angry at him.

"Thanks a lot! It's so nice to know you're loved." She answered sarcastically, but smiled reassuringly at him.

"You know I love you Gin, but it's the most likely scenario and it could work to our advantage."

Ginny's eyes sharpened at his statement. Did he really just admit so openly that he loved her in front of Remus and Tonks? Harry caught



her look and smiled brightly as the color of his cheeks darkened in a blush. He really did mean it! It wasn't just a slip of the tongue. She could see what he felt in his eyes and her heart soared.

"Well, mmmm Hehmmmm.....May be I should just go and well.....uh....I'll just go meditate until Tonks returns." Remus stated clearing his throat trying to break the attention of the two teens. He received no response from them. The only sound was that of a giggling Tonks trying to stifle her laughter at the situation. Realizing the two were lost in the moment, the adults took their cue to leave. Remus escorted Tonks out of the room to say goodbye until later.

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Dumbledore waited impatiently for any response from his Order members after finishing his explanations. Most were too stunned to say anything except one. As expected, his embittered potions master spoke up jogging everyone to attention.

"Excuse me for criticizing your methods headmaster, but you are entirely too lenient on that spoiled brat. If you had sealed his magic long ago as I recommended we would not be in this mess."

"That would not have solved anything Severus as you well know." Dumbledore outwardly chastised while internally seethed at Snape's presumptuousness at stating previously secret plans. He was regretting not having taken the man's advice but he would never say it. He also knew that his more astute Order members would catch Snape's comments and question it. He would have to head off that discussion as it would be more harmful than good. "What we need is to concentrate on finding Mr. Potter right now not rehash the past. That boy is in serious danger with Voldemort's forces running loose and unchecked."

"With all due respect headmaster, I think the past is very relevant in determining where Harry might have gone and more importantly...why. I can't help but wonder why there was ever a discussion about binding Harry's magic as Severus implied and that fits into everything that boy has been through. You, and all of us, have continually pressured him," Arthur said raising his hands to halt

the angry retorts he knew were coming, “ Hear me out! For the first 10 years of of his life, no one was the least bit concerned as to how he was doing. Then when he comes to Hogwarts and into a world he has no idea about, we step in and regulate every aspect of his life to the point where Harry is virtually a prisoner whether at school or at the Dursley’s. What right did we have to do that when we showed no earlier interest? He’s put through years of pain and danger until he is wrongly imprisoned and forced to relive his worst memories, of which there are too many. What do we do? We all abandon him thinking that we know better than he possibly could. Harry is finally proven innocent, by a man none of us have ever met, and to make matters worse, we the people who sent him to hell in the first place expect him to forgive us without even a by-your-leave! Now tell me honestly if you were in his shoes, would you want to forgive us let alone be anywhere near the ones who caused such great pain? Harry has given us more than we deserve by tolerating our presence. I respect that young man more than you could ever know. He didn’t have to come back and he still doesn’t, and no one here could make him as he has proven. When he’s ready, he’ll come back, but if we force it, we’ll end up pushing him farther away.” Arthur finished and sat down quietly next to his wife who looked awestruck at his words. He reached out and gently clasped her hand in his and squeezed gently.

Molly smiled proudly at her husband and her eyes shown with a newfound respect for this normally calm anti-antagonistic man. No one could dare say he didn’t stand up for what he believed in. Her heart swelled with fierce pride at the way he had defended their seventh son, they had learned their lesson the hard way and would never repeat the same mistake or hurt Harry so deeply ever again. It didn’t matter who it was, they would defend the boy as their own and Merlin help anyone who got in the way, even if it was the all powerful leader of the light Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore.

No one spoke after the heartfelt speech Arthur just made. Minerva McGonagall had done some serious self reflection since the morning’s events and was thoroughly disgusted with herself. Arthur was spot on in his beliefs. She felt terrible for breaking the vow she had made when Harry was found innocent. Her actions since the start of the school year were disgusting and ranked up there with Dolores Umbridge. Had she really been so callous as to believe Harry would

be able to forget everything and return to how they wanted him to act? Oh how Lily, James and Sirius must be rolling in their graves to see their once favorite professor treating their adored baby boy like she had. At this point in time she resolved to change her ways, she would think things through from now on and she wouldn't go blindly into the fight any longer. Putting voice to her thoughts she spoke up breaking the silence in the room, "I agree with Arthur on this matter. We have all been grossly unjust in our treatment of Harry. Myself being one of the worst. I am not proud of my actions and am prepared to face the consequences of my actions. However, I am not willing to continue in the same vein as before. Mr. Potter has proven he can take care of himself better than any of us have given him credit for. He is a resilient young man, but even he has his limits which I believe we have pushed him to over these many weeks. We have been blind and I will not see that amazing young man destroyed by our ineptitude. He needs his space now and I for one am going to give it to him. Maybe at some point in the future he will decide to return. I don't think we will have any more success now in finding him then we did over the summer." She proclaimed and then became silent ignoring the surprised and dubious looks cast her way, especially from her two most prominent Gryffindors.

"That is quite possible, however I don not believe we can risk Harry's safety by leaving him alone. He needs to return now. He is not only in danger from Voldemort and his Death Eaters, but I am afraid there is evidence that our mysterious wizard, James Roper, may also be seeking to gain control of the boy. This can only lead to disastrous consequences as this man had proven to be most illusive in his dealings and we are not assured of his alliances. If we do not rescue Harry quickly, I dread whatever sinister intentions he may have for Mr. Potter." Albus argued back hoping they would see his point of view.

"But headmaster, there is no proof that James Roper is anything more than the Goblins chosen representative and that....." Bill tried to say.

"Do not question me further in this matter!" Dumbledore roared shooting out of his seat and letting loose his powerful aura. This stunned everyone present as he had never shown such a heated outburst and lack of control to them before. It was obvious why

Voldemort feared the man, but it was also an indication that their leader was not quite as in control of things as he wanted them to believe. "We need to get Harry back under control or all will be lost!" he harshly stated while reigning in his magic.

Realizing what he let slip in his anger, he took several deep calming breaths and sat back down in his chair, rubbing the bridge of his nose beneath his spectacles.

Arthur Weasley was now livid. The once respected wizard had not listened to a word he said and just confirmed that he didn't care one iota about Harry's welfare except to be his weapon. "He is not something to control headmaster Dumbledore! No matter what you may think, he is a young man with an incredible amount of responsibility on his shoulders and he needs our help not our incessant meddling."

"Contrary to your overzealous self esteem, the headmaster does not answer to the like of you Weasley," Snape sneered, "There are more important priorities than having to deal with than worrying about the immature adolescent rebellion of that imbecile Potter. We all have experiences in life that we would rather not have to deal with and the sooner the boy learns to deal with it like the rest of us the better."

"How dare you!" Arthur started then took a moment to calm himself before he did something rash. "I believe that as a member of this Order I have the right to say what I feel may be pertinent to the situation as well as ask questions. I did not realize that this was a bloody dictatorship. If that is the case, I was sorely mistaken when I joined this organization. As for you Severus, you may have the complete and unwavering trust of the headmaster, but you are far, far away from having it of the rest of us. I have never actually been certain as to which side you place your loyalty in. Your actions of late have tended to prove it belongs elsewhere. You have done nothing but drive a wedge between the members of this Order and dissuade us from doing the job this Order was created to do. I'm not the only one who has noticed this. There is something that you and the headmaster have kept from us that concerns Harry and we believe we have the right to know. Your continued obstinance in keeping this matter secret has gone on far too long. I may not speak for everyone

else here, but I do speak for my family in saying that we will withdraw from the Order if you insist on your present course of action. Be forewarned Albus that we will not tolerate, nor will we aid in your search for Harry without full disclosure of the facts and what we are actually putting our lives in danger for.” Arthur finished strongly, standing tall and presenting a very determined posture.

The silence amongst the members remained as all were too shocked by what was happening. Anymore shocks and several weren't sure they'd be able to survive. First Harry goes missing, then the order meeting where Arthur turned into something they weren't too sure they liked. Albus showing his anger was something no one wanted to be on the wrong side of, but why was he getting so upset with the questions? Minerva standing against the man that she had always fervently supported spun their minds, and what was up with their leader wanting to control the Boy-Who-Lived? Why wasn't he answering the threat that Arthur had just posed? It was all too much to think about.

“Come now Arthur, surely you are not serious in quitting the Order?”

“I most certainly am, as are the rest of my family.”

Albus was silent for a few minutes just staring at Arthur, but it didn't have any visible effect. “I am only concerned for Harry's safety and nothing more as I have repeatedly claimed. We cannot afford these continual squabbles at such a critical juncture in this war.”

“You're right Albus, we cannot, but I do not see you trying to curb the vicious tongue of your illustrious spy.” He pointed out sarcastically. “I also see you are stalling and not providing the answers most of us seek. Albus, I will not wrong Harry again. You may consider the Weasley's no longer a part of the Order of the Pheonix.” Arthur ended in a saddened but determined tone.

“Your oath will not allow you to leave Arthur, must I remind you of the dire consequences you are about to enact?” the headmaster countered.

“Our oaths were to serve the light and fight against the forces of darkness that threaten our world, not to specifically serve you or the Order. There will be no ‘dire consequences’ as you say, as it would have already been invoked. We have broken no oaths and we will always remain faithful to the light” he finished for the final time, realizing nothing more would be gained by arguing any longer. Turning he strode purposefully to the door of the office without looking back.

His wife followed resolutely, but glanced back at those in the room. Her two oldest were beside her but the youngest remained seated next too his studious girlfriend.

“Ronald, come along.” Although she said it in her normal sweet manner, the hard undertone brooked no room for argument.

Ron looked to his unusually quiet girlfriend for help, but she remained steadfast in looking at the floor. Raising his head he looked past his mother, he just couldn’t meet her eyes. “I’m sorry mum, but I’m staying. This is my chance to fight for what is right. I have certain obligations to the cause and I am not about to give them up. I choose to fight this war and I’m old enough to make my own decisions.” He stated puffing out his chest. To everyone else he looked pretty pathetic filled with his own importance. The boy really didn’t know what war was really like.

Molly’s face fell at her son’s words knowing yet another son had turned from what they had try to teach them. Arthur stopped any further discussion by placing a hand on his wife’s shoulder and gently pulling her out the door. Her body was rigid but slowly relinquished to her husbands silent prodding.

Before the door closed behind them, Arthur looked back over his shoulder and met the defiant blue eyes of his youngest son. “Although you are of age son, and your mother and I cannot stop you, I hope that someday you do not come to regret your decision here today. I pray you have fully thought out the consequences of your choices and are not foolishly trying to prove something that is not warranted. If you c hange your mind, know that you are always

welcome at home.” Arthur gave his son a last penetrating gaze then turned and left.

Ron felt the hairs on the back of his neck stand up at the hard glint in his father’s eyes, he felt an odd sense of forboding wash over him, but he wasn’t going to back down now. Things were finally looking good for him even with Potter’s over dramatized theatrics, but Ron wasn’t going to play into it anymore. Harry was no more the ‘Chosen One’ than he was the Keeper for the Chudley Cannons and he was sick and tired of everything revolving around that twit. He and Hermione were actually doing something productive in this war, they were the ones leading the DA and training them to defend Hogwarts, not Harry. He was the one put in charge of ensuring Hogwarts would remain safe not Harry. He had Hermione by his side, who did Harry have? He was bloody well rid of the wanker and he hoped Harry would never return.

As the door shut it reverberated throughout the room and the members reinitiated their arguments causing the noise level to rise significantly after the dead silence of before. Ron sat back down still thinking about what had just happened until Hermione pulled on his sleeve to get his attention.

“Ron, are we doing the right thing?” she asked a little shakily. All she got in return was a confused looking Ron.

Tonks had been forgotten in all the drama, but that was fine by her as she casually stood at the back of the office. She had been so frustrated with this Order meeting that she was bordering on laughing insanely. As soon as Dumbledore had gained back control, he once again insisted on searching for Harry which was received with varying measures of uncertainty but no one else spoke up. She was disgusted with the members lack of conviction and how easily they caved to Dumbledore’s whims. It reminded her of Voldemort and his prostrated lackeys kissing the hem of their master’s dark robe, but this barmy wizard had his lackeys crawling in a different way, they just didn’t see it. It sickened her to see just how little Dumbledore truly cared for anyone. He risked the lives of people that hero worshipped him without blinking an eye and he felt no remorse in doing so. Harry was right when he said that the old man had lived to long and had

lost touch with reality. She was glad she had joined him and was learning more than she ever dreamed. Of course getting together with Remus had its pluses as well. She was seeing things in a whole new way and was grateful for it. Harry would be happy to know that Dumbledore was still clueless to his whereabouts but she was sure he'd be angry hearing about the headmaster's boundless accusations against James Roper. She almost gave herself away trying to hold back her scoffing at the very idea, but then again they didn't have a clue as to who the real James Roper was. Oh yes, joining Harry had turned out to be one of the best things she had ever done and it proved to be quite entertaining as events unfolded.

It wasn't until a few days later that anyone noticed Ginny Weasley was missing, as she hadn't attended any classes. Dumbledore was not looking forward to notifying the family of the recent discovery. As it was turning out, that family was causing him more trouble than he had ever anticipated. If they had pulled out of the Order due to Harry, who knew what they would do when it came to one of their own flesh and blood.

The grounds and castle had once again been turned upside down in the search for her, but it was no use, she was not anywhere within the boundaries of Hogwarts. It was quite disconcerting when he personally searched the suite that was once occupied by the young Miss Weasley along with Harry and Remus. Both young Mr. Weasley and Miss Granger had given him detailed reports on their attempts to enter the suite, but when he arrived there was nothing there. There were no signs of any additional wards or magical traps as had been described. In fact there had been no traces of any magic whatsoever. The suite was exactly how it had been prior to Mr. Potter and his entourage moving in. Not a single clue was left as to where they could've gone, for he was sure that Remus and Miss Weasley were with Harry, he just couldn't prove it.

He hated the fact that once again Harry had slipped through his grasp. Reluctantly he admitted to himself that he had drastically underestimated the boy, but it was a mistake he would not make again. Studying the suite again he was confused as to why Miss Granger of all people would be so wrong in her assessment of the situation. He would have to talk to her and Mr. Weasley as well to figure out what



was going on. Walking back out into the Gryffindor common room, he ran into the two people he had just been thinking about and asked them to follow him up to his office.

Not very far away, the 4 conspirators were wrestling with the best way to inform the Weasley's that Ginny was safe and secure as well as explaining the current circumstances without revealing too much. They couldn't afford risking her position or the others in the events that were unfolding.

After several hours of discussion and upon Ginny's insistence, they came to an agreement about what to write, but not how to deliver the letter. Times like this made Harry long for Hagrid even more, as she had proven time and again that she was a special owl. The rage he felt about her missing grew every time he thought about her as did his determination to find her. He knew she was out there somewhere, he could feel it and when he caught whoever was keeping her, they'd wish they were never born. Somehow he also knew that Dumbledore was involved in keeping her away but had no proof as of yet and he'd pay dearly for his role in that in addition to everything else he had done. In his sick twisted mind, Dumbledore must be thinking of her as leverage against Harry, but it wouldn't work out well for him in the end.

Ginny noticing Harry's distant glassy stare gently touched his arm and leaned in closer to whisper to him. He didn't seem to respond until she started caressing his arm while still softly speaking to him. His eyes returned to normal and he turned to give her a half-hearted smile before returning to the discussion.

None of them knew the status of the wards surrounding the Burrow and that in itself would be risky to obtain. Anyone not keyed into the wards could easily set off alarms alerting anyone present to their arrival. Getting anywhere close enough to the burrow would also be a risk they were not willing to take just to deliver a letter. One thing was for certain though, they had not cast the Fidelius charm because they could remember where it was located. This also meant that it was susceptible to attack.

They couldn't afford sending any of them in person because it would only raise questions they didn't want to answer and most likely it

would result in one of them being restrained or at least the attempt would be made. Even though they could escape, it would be suspicious to the Order and they would know that whoever went was in league with Harry, which would be counter-productive.

“Well we could use regular owl post from anywhere in the country. Even though they could easily track it back to its origin, we would be long gone. However if we needed to use the post again, we might run into a bit of a problem.” Tonks thought aloud.

“No I don’t think that would work, I mean my family might not except owl post from an unknown owl right now and it would take too long. We don’t even know what the wards would do.” Ginny responded still caressing Harry’s arm knowing that this was hard for him as it only brought to the forefront his concern for Hedwig.

“Well that’s possible but it still might be our best solution. I don’t really see them wasting the man power it would take to watch each post station just in case we might use it again.” Harry contributed.

“Too bad you can’t transform into your Pheonix yet Harry, that would solve all our problems.” Remus stated.

“Moony that’s brilliant, I forgot. I can transform. I just need a little more practice with flaming and carrying things. I don’t think a letter will be too difficult though.”

“When did that happen Harry?” Ginny asked surprised at the revelation, but excited none-the-less.

“Only last week, right before all this mess happened. I wanted to be able to transform instantaneously like with the Dire Wolf before telling you. Then that whole incident happened. My mind has been a little preoccupied since then.”

Everyone became quiet after that, but Ginny got over it quickly wanting to see Harry transform. Her excitement bubbled over to the rest of them and they all begged Harry to show them. Lightening up, he agreed and transformed to the delight of his family.

Dumbledore arrived in his office with Hermione and Ron trailing timidly behind him. They weren't sure why the headmaster seemed so upset and only hoped it wasn't something they had done. Since Harry's departure after that amazing display of magic in the Great Hall, everyone in Hogwarts had kept their distance from them. Neither of them appreciated the intense hate filled glares sent their way, and the not so concealed hostility towards them. Even the teachers had been less than pleasant. Hermione was not as capable as Ron was in disregarding this and it hurt to see people that once looked up to her for her advanced knowledge now scorn her. Ron seemed oblivious to it all, but then again she herself had always chastised him for being thick. Contrary to what everyone thought, the visions she had seen had affected her deeply but she couldn't disregard the fact that Harry had been so callous towards them all. She was only try to help him and he constantly pushed her away. She had to admit that some of her methods might not have been the best considering what she had seen, but how was she suppose to know all that when he would never talk about it before. If was if Harry thought they should have all know what was going on.

"Now Miss Granger, Mr. Weasley I need to discuss with you your findings about the suite of rooms most recently occupied by Mr. Potter. Contrary to what you have reported, I found no sign of any magical traps or anything beyond what had been prepared for him for the duration of the school year. Are you absolutely certain that what you reported to me happened?"

"I'm positive headmaster!" Hermione nearly shouted, frantic that her revered headmaster might think she was lying. "We've been trying since the beginning of term to gain entrance to the suite, but nothing has worked. We couldn't even get past the first door. I've researched what I found thoroughly and can't find anything remotely similar to what happened to us. It doesn't make any sense! There's nothing in the Hogwarts library, and I can only surmise that the power inherent within the spell was enormous, but Harry's never been a good student and with him missing a year in Azkaban no less, how could he have used let alone known of such a powerful spell?" she finished almost in tears from frustration.

“Are you absolutely certain Miss Granger, as I had no problem entering earlier today and there was no trace of any additional magic, not even residue left behind by any of the previous occupants. Did they practice in the rooms or somewhere else?” Dumbledore queried, outwardly calm, but silently probing into his young informants mind.

At first Hermione didn't feel the probe as it only sifted through her most recent memories, but as the foreign presence delved deeper, it began to hurt. Recognizing the intrusion she tried to force it out, but it was too strong. The more she fought, the harder the presence pushed to breach the barrier protecting what it assumed was guarding secrets she did not want revealed. She realized it could only be the headmaster doing this to her and she was initially shocked at such a blatant intrusion but it soon turned to anger. The man that she had held above all others was violating her mind because he had did not trust that she was telling the truth.

Regretfully she thought back to Harry's first attempts at occlumency with professor Snape and how critical she had been to him because she thought that he hadn't been practicing. Jealous that he was being given an opportunity to learn a branch of magic that most didn't even know existed, she had berated him for his lack of progress. It should have been easy since he had a master teaching him, now she realized that it wasn't as easy as it had originally seemed. The books she had researched to train herself hadn't mentioned anything like this. She understood better now what Harry had to go through each time he had a lesson with professor Snape, and why he looked so haggard afterwards.

While her train of thought was focused on Harry, Dumbledore pushed harder and found what he sought as well as a lot more. He wasn't sure if he wanted the information but he had it now. Miss Granger hadn't been lying, only keeping secret, private rendezvous' with Mr. Weasley secured within her inner mind. Each incident that she had reported was within her memories which only proliferated his confusion as to what had happened in the suite.

Hermione was furious at her mentor, no ex-mentor. How could she have been so wrong? After finding what he sought the headmaster had left her mind then totally ignored her as if nothing had happened.

He was now talking to Ron asking him very similar questions and from the dazed glazed over eyes she could tell that Ron was being subjected to the Legilimens curse.

Chancing a glance up, she saw the headmasters' gaze locked on Ron. Ron, adorable and loyal as he was, couldn't possibly hope to block such a powerful attack let alone even understand what was going on. Sure, he knew that Harry had gone through this, but he had never been one to comprehend things that easily and even when offered training was not too enthusiastic when he found out he had to work for it. He had been better than when they had first started, but he was still far behind where he should be.

An epiphany hit her hard, they all were a lot more vulnerable than she initially realized. Everything that happened, had hidden agendas. She could see how they had all been manipulated, and Harry, oh my god what had they done to Harry! He was her first true friend and look at how she shoved that back in his face stomping on such a precious gift like yesterdays trash. She wanted to cry out in anguish but knew she couldn't. She didn't want the headmaster back in her head seeing what she had recently come to understand.

Looking again at her red-headed boyfriend and wondered how they had fallen so far. The world as she knew it had crashed around her and she could only hope that somehow they would survive the chaos that loomed ahead. The biggest challenge currently would be to convince the man she loved of their mistakes without provoking the headmaster.

"Come on 'Mione!" Ron said nudging her shoulder successfully gaining her attention.

She hadn't realized they had been dismissed already and surreptitiously glanced up only to meet the scrutinizing gaze of the headmaster. Immediately she looked away avoiding the chance that he might again rape her mind. Silently she stood and accepted the hand Ron offered and walked out of the office, her mind spinning a mile a minute.

Despite the risky nature, Harry had agreed to let Tonks scout out the Weasleys position and slip the message into the Twins shop. As long as she wasn't seen leaving it, there was no way to know who had left it. In her typical fashion, she had played up her clumsiness and no one suspected her of being in league with Harry. She had learned a lot through the twins who didn't want anything to do with the Order after what they had heard from their parents. This only served to strengthen her resolve to find out more.

Tonks turned out to be very good in her deception, learning that all of the Weasley's, except Ron, were in Harry's court. Since the dramatic withdrawal from the Order, the Weasley's were going about their normal business, or as normal as they could in these times. There had been several attempts by Dumbledore to get them to rejoin the Order but they had refused outright. Every night saw the entire family at the Burrow to discuss recent happenings in the world and share the attempts or bribes made by Albus or other Order members to get them back. The Twins were a fountain of information when they had learned that Tonks was on the verge of quitting the Order herself. It even got to the point that Tonks was invited to share dinner with the family when she could after swearing an oath that she wouldn't reveal anything they discussed to anyone outside the family. At first Tonks was reluctant but then she thought of Ginny and that she could easily pass this information on to her, who could pass it on to Harry and Remus.

What bothered her most was that as the week went by, no one had noticed the letter or that Ginny was not at Hogwarts. Ginny wasn't too happy hearing this either but with Harry comforting her, she was able to let it go for now. They had too many other things to concentrate on. Without any external distractions, they were all able to advance quickly in their training. Halloween was fast approaching and with it, the anxious feeling of anticipation.

As other 'normal' teenagers focused on nonsensical activities such as preparing for the Halloween Masquerade Ball, Harry and Ginny were putting in extra effort into training their combat abilities alongside Remus and Tonks. There would be time to play after Voldemort was taken care of. In fact all four had talked about what they wanted to do after the war was over many times in order to keep the gloom of war

at bay. Pranks were pulled regularly which served to enhance not only their stealth capabilities, but also kept them thinking outside the box as to what they could do. It also served to help them all grow closer.

Saturday morning came and with it the Daily Prophet lauding the efforts of Dumbledore and the Ministry in their efforts against the Dark Lord. There was no mention of the powerful stranger that had fought so valiantly over the summer. In fact, the mysterious wizard was conspicuously absent from the news lately. It was as if he had faded into the background, no longer an active force in the fight against evil.

Harry for the most part ignored all of the silent innuendos and accusations. What set him off was the article he had found on the third page hidden behind all the dribble of the glorious Order of the Phoenix and Ministry actions.

#### GOBLIN AMBASSADOR SUSPECT IN LATEST ECONOMY UPHEAVAL

As faithful readers recall, Gringotts appointed a new ambassador over the summer, a wizard by the name of James Roper. Although unsure of this man's credentials, the Goblin Nation saw fit to appoint this unknown to a position of vast power within the wizarding world of Great Britain. Extensive research was unable to shine any light upon the background of the new ambassador and calls into question the motives behind both the Goblin Nation and that of the Ambassador himself.

This reporter was initially honored to cover the proceedings of the first interaction of the ambassador and the Wizengamot late this summer. Details of the meeting were not given during the interviews, other than the fact that the Goblins wished to renegotiate their treaty with the Ministry.

Most will recall the panic this instilled at the time. Now however, we have not seen, nor heard anymore of Ambassador Roper even though new sanctions have been levied by Gringotts. This brings into question his dealings with the Ministry and the Goblin Nation.

New policies enacted by Gringotts recently have sparked this query to a boiling point. Interest rates have skyrocketed all but crippling most honest businesses and hindering Ministry efforts in the war against the Dark Forces. Many witches and wizards have also found it increasingly difficult to access their own vaults entrusted to the Goblins care. Is Mr. Roper behind these nefarious changes? Some sources say exactly that!

“When Mr. Roper demanded audience with the full Wizengamot, he was rud and condescending. He was an arrogant and self righteous phony. His demands were unreasonable and when refused he had the audacity to threaten not only the members of the Wizengamot, but the wizarding community as a whole. I say! I don’t know what the Goblin Council was thinking when they appointed such an uncouth individual.” A ministry official stated who wishes to remain anonymous.

Chief of the Wizengamot, Supreme Mugwump, Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry and recipient of the Order of Merlin first class, Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore had this to say, “I fear with the appointment of this ill-tempered and inexperienced young man, that there will be rough times ahead for the Goblins and the Ministry. The Goblins may have been tricked through dark means in order for the ambassador to achieve his goals.”

When asked what these goals were headmaster Dumbledore only had the following to add before having to rush off to attend to pressing business, “I believe we may not be enlightened to Mr. Roper’s goals until it is far too late to hinder them. I beseech the Goblin Council to re-think their appointment of this questionable brash man before it is too late.”

Is the economic strife the wizarding world experiencing attributed solely to the actions of the Ambassador of the Goblin Nation, Mr. James Roper? Gringotts officials refused to comment when contacted. Is this more damning evidence to the truth of the matter? Is Mr. Roper working in the shadows for He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named? Or is he possibly a new Dark Lord biding his time to take control? Dear readers, be assured this reporter will get to the bottom of these



issues and report back to you with the truth of the illicit activities of the New Ambassador.

Having read enough, Harry incinerated the paper, but not before three sets of curious eyes had read it over his shoulder.

"I can't believe he said all that!?" Remus whispered darkly.

"Well I can! Don't you see what he's trying to do?" Ginny questioned angrily as she plopped into the seat next to Harry. Under the table her hand found his and squeezed it in support. "I wouldn't be surprised if he thought 'Mr. Roper' had kidnapped Harry and was brainwashing him into joining the dark side." She stated sarcastically with a slight smile at the irony of it all.

Harr smiled a bit at this. "Irony really isn't it? He wouldn't be too far off the mark. It's amazing that one so all knowing hasn't pieced it all together. Let him think what he will though. With his attention focused on 'Mr. Roper', he'll continue to underestimate us. He's going to have enough trouble dealing with the ramifications of his little scheme with the Goblins. He's lucky he doesn't have a Goblin rebellion to deal with on top of everything else. Although that may be unavoidable if actions aren't taken to curb his meddling."

"It may not be just the Goblins, if you think about it. I mean, Goblins have always been the most assertive in their rights, it's all you hear in Professor Binns classes. But what if all the other creatures chose to stand-up together against the ministry. I shudder to think what would happen."

"You're right Ginny, the only reason they haven't is pure numbers. The Goblins are fierce warriors and very proud, not someone you want to go up against if you don't have to. Death in battle is an honor above all others to them. They are also very clever. Revolts may be prominent with them, but each time they set out to achieve certain aims. It may take them a while to achieve it but they are cunning and patient when they need to be. Other races unfortunately are not as well organized." Remus added going in to professor mode.

“Can you imagine what a force it would be to have all the magical races join together against a common foe?” Tonks said.

“It would take quite a lot to get them together. Everyone has their own prejudices to overcome.”

“Well this is a lot to think about but not now, we’ve got a lot to do today.”

At Hogwarts, the headmaster was silently delighted in the article published in the Prophet. There were enough negative aspersions printed to sway wizards and witches to the belief of James Roper. Even the Goblins would have to take notice and at least question the viability of keeping the man as their liaison to the ministry. At this time the Goblins couldn’t afford to be so stringent in their beliefs against the ministry it would be politically suicidal for them and they would wind up losing everything they had gained up to now. With Roper out of the way politically, all the levies placed by the Goblins would be removed and the fight against Voldemort could continue unhindered.

Most of the student population seemed to take the article in stride, if they even read it, which wasn’t surprising really. Not very many were politically savvy and wouldn’t see the underlying motivations and maneuverings. The war was at the forefront of their minds, but only in how it affected their loved ones and pocket books. Death Eater attacks were the main worry and whether or not the ministry was successful in stopping them. Numbers of attacks and the losses that came with them were the priority, not the background meanderings of politics.

It saddened him to see that many students were so afflicted by the losses of this war. The affect wasn’t limited to the light-sided families as there were several students with ties to the Dark Lord residing within the castle. Most of these could be found amongst the Slytherins, but others were ferreted out once the articles identified captured Death Eaters. It was a sad state of affairs but it was inevitable in war. Lord Voldemort would strike again and the process would repeat itself, but where and when was the pressing question.

Information had been received that Voldemort was planning an attack on Azkaban, but didn't provide any details. The missive was anonymous and therefore not a reliable source, but he couldn't shake the feeling that he should take it to heart. His spy had no further information to give, which made him wonder whether or not Severus had been found out. He couldn't put the boy in any further danger if that was the case, and they'd have to decide soon.

Ron's response to the article after Hermione made him read it was typical of most of the other students. Hermione however, possessed a critically predisposed mind, at least most of the time, when she was actually thinking for herself and not overly influenced by others. She was all too aware of the undercurrents within the articles which revealed the games being played. Glancing up at the head table she caught the smug self-satisfying expression on the Weasley's face as he scanned the hall. It was obvious he had his hand in the format of the article beyond his incriminating comments. Although she didn't really know James Potter, he hadn't seemed as evil as he was being portrayed when she had met him during the summer. For Merlin's sake, he had saved Ginny from the Dementors!

Even though it was rare for the Goblins to choose a wizard to represent them, they had seen enough in the man to place their trust in him. They were not mindless beasts! That was one thing she had discovered about the wizarding world that she totally disagreed with, their unwarranted bigotry against anyone not human. It was also something she had forgotten about over the last year and she again felt ashamed of her actions.

Thinking over the articles on the front page she saw through them as well. It was suspiciously convenient that the Order and Ministry had been more successful in their fight against the Death Eaters. However, events didn't add up. The activities of the Order had not been increased, they were all still fighting over Harry's whereabouts and the supposed threat of James Potter. Was the Ministry actively increasing their efforts or was it also a sham, taking credit for the work of others. It shouldn't matter who was fighting against the Death Eaters, as long as they were making progress. The Order seemed to think this was bad which really didn't make any sense. What was the old saying, 'The enemy of my enemy is my friend?' Yes that was it so

why didn't Dumbledore trust them? The pieces of the puzzle were starting to actually fit together which only served to distress her more.

Amelia Bones sat fuming in her office after having read the article Dumbledore had pressured the Daily Prophet into publishing. Oh yes, she had found this out quite quickly as the Goblin Council had once again sent a formal complaint about the unjustified accusations inherent in the article. She had spent over an hour discussing it through a secure floo call with them, trying to explain that she did not sanction the article, nor did it reflect the current views of the ministry of magic. It was hard to placate the Goblins and keep them from becoming actively involved. The Ministry could not afford to fight on a third front.

Although most witches and wizards believed the Goblins to be obsessed with gold, she knew differently. When others were falling asleep in their history of magic lessons, she had paid rapt attention. History was a hobby of sorts, and she spent her time researching ancient cultures. Through this she learned that the lessons of the past could be applied to present day events. The Goblins were a proud and clever race, but would only take so much before lashing out. Their prowess in battle magic was unmatched and only numbers kept them from rising up more frequently. That and the fact that they were focused on only a few goals each time they went to war. As soon as it was achieved they backed off and things smoothed over until the next time.

Needles to say, they were starting to rise up and that couldn't happen. All because of what Dumbledore had idiotically published. The man was becoming a thorn in her side. She had great respect for the powerful wizard, but he was too caught up in a past that, although had some relevance today, was not the current situation. Instead of learning from past events, he seemed to want to recreate the glory of his former achievements. It was a dangerous game he was playing, and Amelia could not afford his machinations to lead the wizarding world to their downfall.

Dumbledore had to be limited in his power base as he was blind to the results of his actions. It was time for a new course of actions, one she may not be popular for and may even lose her job for, but she

saw no other option. The job wasn't the important thing. Activating one of the buttons on her desk, she called together the Senior Leaders of the Ministry.

As Dumbledore continued to revel in his assumed victory, he was surprised when a regal black owl landed in front of him and stretched out its leg waiting to be relieved of its delivery. He frowned slightly wondering what this could be and untied the letter. He started momentarily when the bird took off but regained himself and looked over the letter. Seeing the Gringotts seal on the parchment, he inwardly smiled thinking the Goblins had been quick to see his points and respond.

Mr. Dumbledore,

Gringotts in concordance with the Goblin Council, hereby notifies you that all rights and privileges have been terminated with all branches of Gringotts world wide. Your actions and statements are in violation of the Treaty of 1812. We have benevolently overlooked previous infractions of stated treaty, but can no longer allow it to continue. In accordance with said treaty, and your breach of the terms agreed upon therein, Gringotts enacts the authority to confiscate all deeds, monies, and possessions contained within all vaults upon which you are named upon.

However, we will not enforce this measure in full. We allow you one day from receipt of this notification to remove what monies and possessions you so desire from your hereditary vault only. Upon expiration of this allotted time, you shall be banned from ever entering Gringotts or any of its sister facilities or any Goblin held premises until such time as the Goblin Council see fit to reinstate said privileges.

Upon your arrival we have arranged to have a detachment of our very finest warriors to assist you in any way needed with your visit to our establishment.

Regards,

Griphook

Completely stunned, all the headmaster could do was read the letter through several more times to try and understand what was happening. They couldn't do this to him!

## Chapter 22—A Busy Night

While the students of Hogwarts settled down after the mornings events, the headmaster was quickly deciding that this was one of the worst days of his long life. Upon arriving at Gringotts, he was forcefully detained by a contingent of armed goblin warriors when he tried to gain access to the manager's office. No amount of persuasion or threats would sway them to his cause. In the end he had no choice but to abide their edict and remove what he could before his time ran out.

The fact that his other vaults were off limits to him filled him with an anger he had not felt since his fight with Grindewald. He couldn't even assign a trusted agent to access the vast fortunes he once had unlimited control over. The only bright spot of the entire trip was that his vault contained several trunks that would adequately hold everything in the vault so at least he wouldn't lose family heirlooms and other priceless artifacts contained therein.

After being unceremoniously escorted out of Gringotts, he turned around for one last scathing comment only to find that he could no longer see the great white marble façade of the building. It finally sunk in just how serious the goblins were about this and it worried him greatly. His only recourse to rectify this would be from the Ministry itself, and as Supreme Mugwump he would have the Wizengamots full support to force the goblins to rescind their decision or face the wrath of the Ministry.

Making his way to the said establishment with a new purpose in mind, he did not notice the disbelieving shocked looks he received from wizards and witches who had witnessed his earlier unruly outburst within the bank. His mind was working overtime planning what he needed to do to convince the members of the Wizengamot and the Ministry to take action against the goblins.

Somehow, he surmised, James Roper was behind all this. That whelp would rue the day he was born for meddling in his affairs.

As he arrived at the Ministry, he received a summons to an emergency meeting. Curious as to what the meeting was about, he

quicken his pace. This would work to his advantage if everyone was already on their way. Finally something was going in his favor and he'd be able to get things fixed quickly.

Entering the ceremonial chamber, he stopped in his tracks as all talking had silenced around him. He was disturbed to find he was the last to arrive. The angry stares he received further unsettled him. The silence was like a death knell. Dumbledore could feel it down to his bones that he was not going to walk out of these chambers the same as he had entered.

Not long after this thought had entered his mind, the silence was interrupted. Minister for Magic Amelia Bones rose from her seat and in a firm voice stated, "Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore, it has been decreed by an overwhelming majority that you are hereby removed from the position of Supreme Mugwump as well as all rights and privileges there unto disposed. It is further the decree of this body that you are forthwith removed from your position as a representative to the International Confederation of Wizards. The extreme abuse of your position and power will no longer be tolerated. Your private chambers are to be vacated immediately and will be locked to you upon the morrow. Further sentencing will be considered upon review of the evidence presented and the will of this court. You are dismissed!" Instead of sitting back down, the minister continued staring hard at the man she had just summarily dismissed, as if daring the headmaster to challenge her.

Albus was in such a state that he dare not remain another minute. After all he had done for this world, this was how he was treated? Thrown away like yesterday's trash? They would regret their decision before this was all over, he would make sure of that.

Walking back to the only place he still had control of, he thought about where he had gone wrong. How were they continually outmaneuvering him? He didn't think the article this morning was as damaging as it turned out to be. It had certainly backfired quite magnificently on him. He was again frighteningly confused as to how James Roper had managed to orchestrate such an annihilating and intricate attack. He wouldn't give in as easily as they expected though.



Hogwarts was still his and somewhere out there was Harry Potter. Once the boy's anger had subsided, Albus was certain he'd show his face somewhere and then the boy would be back under control. First things first, he would have to call an Order meeting and find a way to mitigate the damage that had been wrought this day.

It was late afternoon before all the members had congregated at Hogwarts and Dumbledore was not happy. Minerva and the other professors were put out because they had been preparing the Great hall for the ball that he had insisted upon having. His head girl looked upset as well and Dumbledore attributed her mood to the fact that this meeting would seriously cut into her preparation time.

The other Order members held various expressions on their faces ranging from curiosity to apathy. Once again the meeting fell to pieces when he relayed the events of the day. Some were outraged at the treatment he had received by the goblins, while others were pondering the ramifications of their alliance with the headmaster and how it would affect their banking transactions. Still others had agreed that he had in fact abused his positions. Arguments once again erupted and Albus wondered if there wasn't a curse of some sort on his members that caused them to argue every time they got together.

While the Order was wasting their time and accomplishing nothing, Harry, Ginny, Remus and Tonks were preparing for the upcoming battle. They hoped both the Order and Ministry were preparing as well but weren't expecting it.

With all their equipment triple checked, they set off to survey the area. Of the 4, only Harry and Tonks had ever been to Azkaban, so it took considerable effort for both Ginny and Remus to fight off the overwhelming despair the place instilled. Although they stayed outside the warded areas and disillusioned, it was still difficult. This only made them worry about what the impact would be on them closer to the prison.

Ginny couldn't believe Harry had survived his time on the island, even though she knew the whole story. Her respect grew for the man he was becoming. She was glad he had the opportunity to spend time in the other realm with people who loved him and thanked them

profusely for saving his life. She knew if that hadn't happened Harry would be dead by now, prophecy or not, and the rest of them would soon follow.

Harry surveyed the entire island through his omnoculars and sent his magic out to feel the condition of the wards without activating them. It was a little tricky, as the barrier was thick with overlapping layers of wards, there were some surrounding the island and a separate barrier around the prison itself, but he got a good idea of how long they would last against the forces Voldemort was sending. They discussed the best strategic places to position themselves and their traps.

The fortress itself sat high upon the cliffs at the North end of the island and could only be accessed from a land bridge that began at the southern beach and rose up to the prison effectively cutting the island in half. Enemy landings on either the west or east beaches would require forces to move to the south beach to intercept the land bridge. This bridge was not overly accommodating; two giants walking side by side would be hard pressed to keep from falling off the sides, and would be easily spotted from the outer walls of the fortress. Death Eaters on the other hand would have an easier time of it although they too would have to be careful not to slip off the edge in their rush to gain the walls. The drop on either side was none too pleasant as they were sheer cliffs of about 100ft to the beaches below.

Harry surmised the Aurors and Order members would station themselves as close to the fortress as possible which would probably be on the outer defense wall. This would in effect box them in, allowing the Dark Forces free reign of the open terrain of the beaches. With the wards intact, their position would be formidable, but without them the defenders would fall quickly. Keeping the wards up would seem the smart course of action. In order to do this however, it would require at least 20 powerful and experienced ward casters committed only to the wards. This would take up a lot of energy, constantly raising wards while the enemy was tearing them down. It would not only deplete their energy but would take useful fighters away from the main threat and therefore prolonging the battle.

With the forces of Voldemort controlling the beach, any reinforcements arriving on the island would be taken out easily. If the wards were down they could apparate right into the prison, but so could reinforcements for the enemy. The prison would be harder to defend with the wards down, but would allow much more flexibility in movement to attack the enemy instead of awaiting the enemy to close in on them.

Harry decided he would let the Ministry and Order fight their own way while his team would stick to their plan with a little modification during the battle. Their occlumency was far beyond master level and they could send short quick messages back and forth which would be adequate for short commands. For them, stealth would be paramount so they would maintain either their disillusionment or become invisible when the need arose. Another tactic that Harry had employed while training them was to keep in constant motion to prevent the enemy from detecting where the spells were coming from. This also served to present the illusion to the enemy that there were more of them fighting.

The purpose tonight hinged on these tactics to fulfill their twofold objective. The first being to liberate Azkaban from Ministry control while preventing the Dark Forces from taking it and second to highlight the ineptitude of the light armies current way of fighting this war. He wasn't callous enough to push aside the fact that people would die tonight, but this was war and the wizarding world needed a wake up call if they wanted to win. No matter how they chose to fight tonight, Harry would not interfere unless it threatened his objectives. There would be more than a few surprises awaiting Voldemorts minions that would aid in accomplishing this.

As the sun set over the horizon, the eerie quiet reigned as the four fighters checked and re-checked their battle plans and devices. They knew that things could change in a heart beat and were prepared. Still no-one had shown on the outer walls of the fortress except the occasional guard quickly walking across to disappear within the stone building at the other side conducting his rounds.

Glancing over the dark waters, Harry caught sight of several large objects approaching the island and was instantly alert. This was it, it

was now upon them. Adrenaline surged through his veins as he sent word to the others to get ready.

As the shadowy shapes grew closer, his muscles tensed in anticipation. Sparing a short burst of magic towards the fortress revealed that no-one else had arrived to help. Whether or not they showed, he could wait no longer as the large boats ran ashore, and the first wave of the dark forces surged onto the beach. Their white masks were the only discernable feature in the pitch blackness. They were the curse breakers whose mission was to bring down the wards.

Although he itched to take them all out in one fell swoop, he held back keeping to their plan. He could feel the others anticipation as well and sent out a reassuring message to keep them restrained.

As the curse breakers crept forward under the cover of the night, more figures emerged from the boats filling the sandy ground their comrades had left empty. This second force was much larger and not as quiet. Incorrectly, they assumed they would not be detected by anyone since they were outside the wards and couldn't be seen in the dark from anyone on the castle walls.

Harry had anticipated the boats leaving to bring in reinforcements, but they didn't budge from their moorings. This could be advantageous as it meant there would be no more than the 11 Giants and 5 Mountain Trolls to eliminate. The Death Eaters were a different story, a rough estimate put their numbers at about 100 maybe a little more, but once the wards were down more would apparate onto the island.

Without aid from the Order or Ministry, Harry's team would have work with great finesse and efficiency, but he was sure they would be victorious.

The curse breakers reached the edge of the wards and started their work with great care. Grudgingly Harry acknowledged their prowess as they kept the wards from activating any alarms. The rest of the army milled restlessly in safety on the beach waiting for the signal to attack. Several hissed arguments erupted when the giants and trolls tried to move forward, but a few Death Eaters were able to get them

back under control preventing them from giving away the surprise attack.

A sharp crack echoed through the night signaling the fall of one of the many wards protecting the fortress. Still no alarms sounded, but that crack should have alerted someone in the fortress. A few minutes of tense watching turned up nothing on the walls, so the curse breakers continued their work.

Harry didn't have time to think about it though as that crack also signaled the start of their own operations. While the Dark Forces carried on oblivious, the four checked their range and then let loose four jets of yellow light that zoomed with incredible speed toward the dark army. The lights were spotted immediately and some Death Eaters dove for cover while others stared too stunned that they were being attacked. The streams of magic continued on their path uninterrupted striking with a blast four different points on the ground. Sand flew up into the air obstructing the vision of those unlucky enough to be in the vicinity of the blast. Once the debris settled, the same unfortunate individuals found themselves sinking quickly into the ground. Before they could react, they were neck deep in the beach and another spell hit freezing them in place.

The four wanted to cry out in triumph at the success of their first trap, but couldn't afford to give up their positions. The Quick Sand traps had taken out three giants, 2 Mountain trolls and 10 Death Eaters who were still screaming at their comrades to get them out.

The once calm army erupted into chaos. No one could figure out where their attackers were and no matter what they tried, they couldn't get those who were trapped out. Their attention now scattered, the four renegades to advantage of the situation and set off several more traps spread throughout the length of the beach. The beauty of the plan was in the seemingly randomness of the traps that sprung to life.

With the beach apparently coming alive, the primal mindset of the giants and trolls kicked in and they surged forward trying to escape the ground that had swallowed their tribe members. As they scrambled forward towards the barrier, a wall of fire erupted out of the

ground 10feet into the air, setting those in its path afire and halting others before they reached it.

Another crack sounded as another ward fell, shortly followed by blaring alarms as those within the fortress were alerted by the fire wall. The night was filled with the sound of alarms and the terrible screaming of those engulfed in flames, burning alive. It seemed that the Death Eaters weren't totally heartless as they frantically tried to put out the deadly flames, but the flames continued on unabated.

The Giants and trolls however were only moderately affected as their skin was much tougher. Although their clothing burned off, they only sustained a few second degree burns serving to enrage them and again they rumbled forward past the curse breakers setting off the remaining alarms from the wards still intact.

Suddenly spells cast from the walls of Azkaban lit up the night as the guards had finally rallied to the threat. The fire wall served to light the field of battle and the giants and trolls lumbering up the hill to attack whatever was in their path.

The curse breakers continued on as they were out of range of the guards. Another ward fell.

The wall of fire continued to blaze hotly preventing the advance of the Death Eater army, which kept trying to find a way to put it out or some way around it. Shield charms didn't work and neither did drenching themselves in water. The wall seemed to stretch the entire width of the path leading up to the fortress so there was no way around it.

The wards began to fall quicker and with each crack the Death Eaters grew more confident despite being discovered. Soon they would be able to apparate closer to the fortress.

Reaching the outer wall of the prison, the giants and trolls began pounding on it with fists and clubs; some even threw large boulders that lay precariously on the sides of the road. With each impact, the walls shook, but held. It was a small area for so many large beings to work in and they grew frustrated. One of the smaller giants in his frustration threw back his club in an attempt to gain more impact

strength, only he unintentionally hit the leader of his tribe in the head. Roaring in pain and anger, the leader grabbed the smaller giant and jerked him back, his fist already swinging to deliver a powerful blow. The blow landed and sent the giant stumbling back crashing into the others, but his momentum wasn't stopped. His foot caught and he was pitched over the edge of the road to fall to his death nearly 100 feet below.

The others watched unmoved by this and then began again their pounding amidst the spell fire from the walls.

Another ward fell and Harry realized that it was the anti-apparition ward. Looking over the Death Eater's he knew they couldn't tell which ward had fallen, for none of them attempted to apparate. They were all waiting for the signal that all the wards were down.

Harry hated waiting and since he couldn't count on any additional aid, he gave the signal to start their stealth attacks on the Death Eaters. Those that were off by themselves fell first either dead or incapacitated. Harry left it up to each individual as to how they took out their targets. Harry held nothing back, but he did not use any dark spells or any of the unforgivables. He had estimated the Death Eaters at around 200 when he set off the firewall, and had already taken out 10 himself. He continued his search for easy targets, but they were becoming harder and harder to separate out from the larger groups.

Hundreds of cracks sounded indicating the apparition of witches and wizards and Harry hoped it was reinforcements. He was partially rewarded as more spell fire converged on the giants and trolls, but the increased defense did not go unanswered as Death Eaters appeared behind their large allies returning fire. The cracks served as a signal to those on the beach that the wards were down and soon they were apparating to join their fellows in the assault on the fortress.

While the opportunity lasted, Harry signaled the others to make their way to the waters edge. Easily they avoided the enemy force as they were still invisible and made it to the beach undetected. He directed them to set the boats on fire using silently cast Incendios, and then moving to another position so they couldn't be pinpointed. The ships exploded as intended and cast the entire beach alight.

The Death Eaters taken by surprise had no choice but to either retreat or move forward. The fear of Voldemorts wrath made the decision and easy one for them and they apparated up to the fortress congesting the area outside the fortress even more.

When the first siren sounded, it alerted the ministry of the attack and Kingsley Shacklebolt raced through the halls to alert the minister. He slid to a halt at the door to her office as a memo came flying out nearly hitting him in the face. Entering he found Amelia bones frantically sending out copious memo recalling forces to send to Azkaban. Kingsley was slightly taken aback by her preparedness, but then remembered the anonymous warning they had received. At least Madame Bones had taken the threat more seriously and had some semblance of a plan to react. With her forethought they would be ale to respond with enough Aurors to fend off the attack. At her slight nod of acknowledgment, Kingsley raced off again to report to his other boss.

As soon as the floo connected, he was disheartened. Order members were still gathered in the headmaster's office arguing, even though the official meeting had ended several hours ago. He tried to get their attention, but their raised voices drowned him out.

Albus Dumbledore finally noticed the active floo and turned his attention to receive it.

"What is it Kingsley?" he questioned.

Kingsley snapped his head to the voice to see Albus squatting in front of him to facilitate an easier conversation. "It's Azkaban; we're receiving alarms that the wards are being breached. We haven't received any reports from the Aurors stationed there yet, but the Minister has already started recalling the rest of the department. We have no idea what we're up against, but we could use your help."

Albus scratched his long bearded chin the nodded. "We'll send as many order members as we can to the fortress. Do you have portkeys available to get them there?"



The question in its simplicity caught Kingsley off guard. Although it was a valid concern for most, never before had the leader of the light asked for a ministry approved portkey in such an emergency. He just made them himself and dealt with the consequences afterwards. "Albus I don't have any preset portkeys and it would take too long to get them ready! If we don't get there soon it may be too late!" he nearly shouted. He noticed that behind Albus the other order members had quieted down and were trying to listen.

"Quite the contrary my dear man. Severus has assured me that Voldemorts forces are minimal at best. I'm sure the ministry will be able to contain the situation. However, I will gather those available and await the portkeys in case you need us."

Kingsley couldn't believe this! He was about to retort angrily when something tapped him on his shoulder. Taking a momentary leave, he read the missive that had interrupted his floo call and became alarmed at its contents. Immediately reconnecting the floo, he urgently addressed the infuriatingly calm Albus. "Sir, they have Giants and Trolls attacking the fortress and it looks like the anti-apparition ward is about to fall. I do not believe this is as small a force as you have been led to believe. We need help Albus, we can't let Azkaban fall!"

The look that graced the headmasters face would have been one for the record books if the situation wasn't so dire. "We'll be there as soon as possible." Was all the man said before disconnecting the floo.

Kingsley wasted no more effort on the Order, he had troops departing for battle that he needed to concentrate on. He hoped Albus would show, but he had to make sure his Aurors would live to fight another day without losing Azkaban in the process.

The recalled ministry Aurors were the first to arrive on scene at the prison and they were quite unprepared. The only actual attacking force seemed to be the giants and trolls beating upon the outer defense walls in an attempt to bring them down. The greater threat in their minds were the wards that they could sense weakening with every minute. The first priority therefore lay in re-establishing the wards. While the original Auror presence engaged the large magical

creatures at the walls, the recently arrived split into two groups. The first formed in the inner bailey and started to reconstruct the badly damaged wards while the other group joined their comrades on the walls.

A large explosion lit the night but the Aurors inside the walls continued to struggle in their effort to raise wards that were falling faster than they could bring them back up. They failed to see and therefore comprehend that the greater danger lay waiting beyond.

When Dumbledore and his Order finally arrived, he was quite shocked by the considerable forces Voldemort had committed to this effort. It was easily 5 times the force Severus had reported, which worried him, thinking that his spy may be compromised. Somehow Voldemort must have found out Snape's loyalty to the Order and purposefully fed him false information. He prayed his potions master was safe and unharmed, but now he had to concentrate on the battle at hand.

He saw the ministry Aurors in the bailey and ordered his followers to assist the others on the walls in fending off the attackers. He himself quickly took position alongside Moody in firing powerful reductor curses at the giants while looking at what lay beyond. He was impressed with the fire wall the Aurors had erected preventing forward movement while the wards had been intact, even though it was virtually useless now. He silently urged the Aurors in keeping the wards up.

Back on the beach the four guerillas were busy dodging an array of curses flung haphazardly by the Death Eater army that remained on the beach as they desperately sought out their unseen attackers. Using a variety of simple prank items strategically placed, they had successfully created diversions that kept their locations from being detected but also keeping the Death Eaters confused.

The constant movement of the four kept them relatively unscathed except for a few cuts and bruises from spell damage they were unable to avoid and were not that harmful. Unlike the enemy, they had better control of the battle, some might say it was an unfair advantage or a coward's approach, however tactically they were

exploiting their own resources and the enemies weaknesses. It was warfare that up until now only the Death Eaters' had been using and didn't know how to combat against it. Their strategy of attacking en-masse was lacking when taking into consideration such tactics, yet again they had underestimated possible resistance.

With a loud BOOM and a fierce trembling of the ground, all fighting was brought to a standstill. Harry was the first to realize that the last of the wards had fallen and quickly relayed this to the others. It was now futile trying to raise the wards again as it would take too much time and energy. He only hoped the Aurors realized this and committed themselves to the primary threat. With a last look around at the field of Death Eaters, he gave the command for the next phase of battle. All four silently apparated off the beach to assume position outside the walls of Azkaban. Pre-scouted, these positions would allow them a modicum of protections from both the defenders and the attacking army, but it wouldn't last for long. The fighting started up again while they waited silently for the inevitable. It didn't take long. The bone chilling cold swept out from Azkaban and despair filled the hearts of the humans fighting all around.

Black cloaked shadows began floating ominously from within the prison seeking prey. The dark soul eaters cared not which side one was on, only the quality of the meal it would consume. Hundreds of the creatures swarmed the battlefield until none were left inside.

Taken by surprise by the intensity of the overwhelming feeling the Dementors instilled, none were able to produce effective Patronus's to fight off the creatures. It was a swift and deadly tactic that should have been foreseen but was not. Those closest to the prison would fall first if nothing was done to stop them. This was exactly what Voldemorts forces had been hoping for. Even Dumbledore was staggered by the attack.

Harry was the first to react, uncorking his vial followed shortly by Ginny, Remus and Tonks. Four brilliant beams shot out from the vials forming their own whirlwinds bent on sucking in the evil wraiths feeding on the souls of those within their reach. Picking up speed, and creating powerful vortexes that could be seen on the mainland, they pulled at the Dementors who struggled vainly against them.

Time passed slowly as the vortexes swirled on, gaining power and pulling harder. The weaker Dementors succumbed to the force and were drawn into the force to be destroyed.

Those that could, watched in awe at the spectacle and some even remembered the reports of the same thing happening in Diagon Alley over the summer. Few recalled that it was connected to a mysterious wizard that had been fighting Death Eaters at the time. The thought passed quickly as more of the Dementors were sucked in and destroyed.

Dumbledore however, became angry once he regained his faculties. Those vortexes meant James Roper was on the island but he didn't know for sure what side the man fought for. He was predisposed to believe the man was working for Voldemort and had a bad feeling about what his presence meant. As more Dementors were destroyed, more of the people that hadn't received the full Dementors kiss started to come around. There were quite a few lost, but he couldn't dwell on that now.

Finally the whirlwinds calmed having sucked in and destroyed all the Dementors of Azkaban. It was still dark and gloomy, but the effect of the foul creatures had diminished and those fighting were returned to their right minds. The fighting once again started up full force in the battle for dominance over the isle.

Having successfully rid the world of Dementors, the four abandoned their positions once again to take up their next ones and awaiting anxiously the signal. It had been a long night so far and they had far to go.

With the use of the vials, Harry knew that most would associate their presence with that of the mysterious wizard, some would be able to make the connection to James Roper. He was counting on this association to a certain extent.

The Death Eaters looked around warily as they fought not wanting to fight the wizard who had dispatched, in one way or another, many of their comrades. The Order and Dumbledore grew more cautious as well but this only served to weaken their position. They were

outnumbered significantly by the Death Eaters and this gave the army of evil more confidence to press the advance.

The giants and trolls who had been unaffected by the Dementors had continued their assault on the walls and were starting to see some results. Several had fallen to coordinated Reducto curses that toppled them off the edge of the cliff into the ravine below, but the others continued on.

Cheers rose up from the defenders as the giants were defeated, but it was short lived as those cheers turned to screams when the wall succumbed in one battered spot and crumbled taking with it those who stood upon it. The opening it left was large enough for the attacking army to slip through. First through were the trolls, then the giants, followed by the Death Eaters. They pushed forward allowing room for the curse breakers to enter the bailey to start dismantling the wards on the prison itself.

The defenders were finding it increasingly difficult now that they were being attacked from all sides. They were out in the open now and had no defense to fall back to. Half their effort was spent guarding themselves while the other was trying to protect their friends and allies from harm. Their stunners were true, but ineffective as sheer numbers were overwhelming them. As one Death Eater fell another took their place, while another enervated the one stunned. It was a continual cycle that could not be beat and the defenders found themselves forced back against the main doors of the prison and surrounded. It was evident they could not hold the prison while so exposed and outnumbered.

Dumbledore gave the order to retreat into the fortress and erected an immense shield to hold off the enemy to allow time for the retreat. He was relieved but disheartened to see many of his followers assisting the many wounded inside. How could things have gone so wrong? Where did all the Death Eaters come from and how were they controlling the giants and trolls? His mind drifted back to the battle and maintaining the strong but draining shield. As the spells hit the shield, he could feel the force as they bounced off and knew it wouldn't last long with so many hitting it at once. He kept an eye on

the progress of those retreating and silently urged them to move faster.

Finally the last of the wounded was moved into the safety of the prison and he began to back towards the doors himself while shakily maintaining the strength of the shield. The bailey was littered with the fallen and his heart was heavy to see that the majority wore the bright red robes of the Ministry's Auror Force. So many!

He reached the doors and let his shield drop just as he stepped over the threshold of the door. Swiftly they were slammed shut while others secured the door with iron bars and protection spells. Dumbledore, though tired and drained added to those to re-enforce and make them stronger. Knowing it was only a brief respite, he got to work taking stock of their situation. Nervous chatter mixed with the moans of the wounded and the quiet shuffling of feet of those assisting the wounded.

Dumbledore cast a Lumos spell to provide more light until the torches could be re-lit. It cast the entry hall into an ominous gloom. As each torch was lit, light flooded the hall revealing a sight just as gruesome as the one they had left. Furniture was demolished, scorch marks sporadically spotted all surfaces, and the worst part were the silent unmoving guards that remained staring lifelessly ahead. Their bodies sat listlessly against the walls where they had succumbed to the Dementors before they had broken free of the prison. Nearly 20 soulless bodies lay around the hall.

A few screams and gasps were heard amongst those that took in the sight. Some ran crying to those they recognized while others were too shocked to move. Realization hit Dumbledore like a bludger to the head, they would not win this fight. Too many were incapacitated. He could see the fight leave the eyes of those still standing.

"Please! Everyone remain calm, we must take care of the wounded and prepare to leave. The doors will not hold for long and soon the wards that protect this fortress will fall as well. We are severely outnumbered and must live to fight another day and warn the ministry of what has transpired here."

Pounding began on the doors startling all within, and signaling the final assault against the last bastion of the keep. Each of the weary defenders looked defeatedly at each other, before finally resting their eyes on their last hope, Albus Dumbledore.

"I'm sorry my friends, but Azkaban is lost. We cannot fight this force without reinforcements and we do not have time to waste awaiting them. We must abandon the prison to regroup for the battle ahead, but do not doubt that we will prevail in the end. All of you please seek medical aid and help those that need assistance. I will go with Alastor and Montgomery to report to the Minister. Take care my friends!" he finished and then disappeared. The others followed quickly realizing that if Dumbledore could apparate, which meant the wards were down and the Death Eaters would soon be upon them.

Harry and the others were waiting impatiently to begin their next assault, hopefully the final one. It was hard watching people injured or killed, especially those on their own side, but they waited. Harry kept his senses tuned to Dumbledores magical signature, waiting for him to disappear. For a long intense moment he thought the fool would remain and was relieved when the old wizard finally vanished. Sensing the others within leaving right after, he sent the signal to his cohorts.

An activation spell was cast upon the hidden doors of the keep which led directly to the bailey. Ginny and Remus then silently apparated to the beach.

A reverberating gong sounded and was felt down to the bone by all. The giants and trolls looked around dumbly forgetting their attack against the inanimate stone walls. It also stopped the attack of the Death Eaters upon the doors. Chains squealed and gears grinded heavily as if fighting against some humongous load. Four enormous doors shimmered into view and slowly came to life as they ominously opened outwards. Pitch black was the interior they revealed bit by bit.

A shiver ran down the necks of those with more prominent imaginations. Not knowing what to expect, the dark clad humans targeted the door nearest to them preparing for what was within.

Minutes seemed to stretch on as they waited for whatever was within to show itself. As if in answer, four pairs of large yellow eyes gleamed amongst the dark, accompanied by deep ferocious growling. As one the enemy took a step back from the doors. The shadowy shapes of the creatures was soon discerned with each languorous step they took out of the abyss.

Without realizing it, the Death Eaters' continued their retreat backwards away from the threat, until a scream rent the silence. All heads snapped to where the scream had originated and what they saw made their hearts pound heavily in fear.

One of the beasts had fully emerged from the dark maw in which it lived, and was revealed in all its gory glory by the moonlight and fires which still glowed. Not long after, the others joined the first.

Dreading that what they saw was real, the Death Eaters looked at each of the four creatures in turn, and knew without a shadow of a doubt they were living their worst nightmare.

The creatures continued their slow predatory stalking with a glint of feral anticipation and hunger in those luminescent yellow eyes. The growling escalated as they drew closer to their prey and that solitary scream turned into many as the Death Eaters turned and ran as fast as they could away from the deadly threat of the Nundus now behind them. It was well known that with one toxic exhalation from the beasts all in its path would be dead. Also well known was that they were near impossible to kill, their hides being nearly as strong as a dragons.

The basic instinct of all humans when faced with life or death kicked in. Most ran, some dropped to the ground cowering, giving in to the inevitable. Darkness quickly consumed them wrapping them in the bliss of nothingness.

Adrenaline rushed through those that ran. All they had to do was get to the beach and they'd be safe, or so they thought. Reality would hinder their every step. Outside the walls of Azkaban, they ran down the road to the beach, but the closer they got the harder it became to move as their lower extremities swelled and sharp pains shot up



through the rest of their bodies. The ground had come alive with what looked like thousands of little rocks. They swarmed anything that came through their territory.

On closer inspection, they were not rocks, but toadstools that were attacking the feet and ankles which were in reach of the little buggers. Small mouths filled with rows of needle like teeth opened and bit through leather and clothing to inject their venom into the flesh of its victims.

Curses sprang from hundreds of wands trying to fend off the ankle biting nuisances, but as soon as one was gone, several more charged in to take its place. While some Death Eaters forced themselves forward, others tried to fight off the biting menaces. Some of the more astute Death Eaters regained their senses and apparated away, but the sound was drowned out by the crying and screaming of the others.

Ginny and Remus watched the struggling Death Eaters and tried not to laugh at their plight. It was amazing how such a simple tactic could incapacitate the feared black robed army of the self proclaimed Lord Voldemort.

As the first of the Death Eaters reached the beach, they were lulled into a false sense of security. Seeing nothing harmful they sank onto the sand breathing heavily but relieved to be away from the dangers behind them. Their ankles and feet were swollen and burning but they were safe. Their concentration turned to relieving this pain but nothing seemed to work. As they tried over and over again, they failed to note the wispy fog rolling in and engulfing them in its confounding embrace.

It wasn't until low guttural growls were heard that they looked up from their ministrations in alarm, only to find they couldn't see a thing. The fog was too thick. The growling grew louder and thinking the Nundus had followed them to the beach, some let out pathetic whimpers. Some fainted dead away, some froze to scared to move, again some were able to apparate.

A strong wind picked up lifting the fog a little and the Death Eaters that could quickly glanced at their surroundings. As the fog continued to lift, the growling became louder and seemed to come from the direction of the shoreline.

Visibility became better, but it might have been better if they still couldn't see, for stalking them were none other than 8 Manticores. They were surrounded! Behind there were the dratted ankle biters and the Nundus and now before them were vicious man-eating Manticores! The fear of Voldemorts wrath left them as they frantically searched for an escape route.

They knew that one false move and the Manticores would be on them tearing them to shreds. Once again fear overwhelmed a few and as they dropped to the ground the Manticores burst into a run charging their victims. A loud crack echoed but the beasts didn't waiver from their course. Another crack sounded and then as if a dam had broken, more cracks sounded as the Death Eaters were reminded of the magical abilities and apparated away from the thrice damned island. Soon all able bodied Death Eaters had abandoned their mission and all that remained were the dead, wounded and unconscious.

What was left of the fog instantly disappeared followed by the Manticores, Nundu's and the Ankle biting Toadstools. It was as if they had never existed.

Ginny and Remus began stunning and binding any Death they came across whether dead or alive as they moved up the beach. Halfway to the road they met up with Harry and Tonks who were doing the same. They had captured 53 Death Eaters and about 32 were dead. Now all they had to take care of were the remaining giants and trolls still beating mindlessly upon the walls. It would be a senseless slaughter, but they couldn't chance Voldemort using them again. They had to move quickly now as they didn't want the ministry returning before they had accomplished what they set out for.

Quietly they approached two giants that had wandered off from the group. Pairing up they coordinated their spell work. Harry and Remus cast spells at the ground turning it to molten lava, while the girls

raised the lava up to surround and consume the giants in its fiery death. It took quite a bit of effort but it was the fastest way to devour the large spell resistant creatures. They repeated the process on the remaining trolls and giant until none were left.

They were almost done now and were finding that their bodies were tiring fast. Aches they hadn't felt before were now surfacing, but they had to finish. They were almost done.

"Double check everything. Make sure no other Death Eater's are still around including the prisoners within the fortress. Check to see if there are any surviving Aurors that may need attention. If there are any alive take care of them until I get back." Harry tiredly commanded. The others nodded and set about their last task. The sooner Harry got back the quicker they could get some well deserved rest. During their search, they found 27 Aurors still alive although badly wounded. They treated the wounds quickly then obliviated them.

Only about a half hour later did Harry return, but not alone. With him were about a thousand goblins. Some were prepared for battle, but most were outfitted to begin some serious construction work. They followed Harry as he walked up to where Remus, Tonks and Ginny were waiting.

Harry gave a weary smile to his friends and turned slightly to address the richly garbed goblin beside him. "Most honorable High Lord Rank-N-Stack, I Harry James Potter, rightful conqueror of the Isle of Azkaban do hereby take possession of said isle by right of Wizarding Law established and upheld since ---." As Harry stated this a flash of light consumed the island and disappeared as quickly as it came.

The goblins equivalent to a smile broke out on Rack-N-Stack's face as the magic flared recognizing Harry's claim. Harry breathed a sigh of relief as did his companions.

"As rightful owner of the Isle of Azkaban, I hereby relinquish all claims to the isle and bequeath all lands and possessions contained thereon to the Goblin nation from this day until such time as the Goblins no longer see fit to occupy it. Upon such a time, it is the Goblin Nations right to disperse with the isle as they see fit. Do you High Lord Rack-

N-Stack, as ruler of all Goblins accept the Isle of Azkaban for your people?”

“I Lord Rack-N-Stack as ruler of the honorable Goblin Nation do hereby accept the isle of Azkaban and all possession contained thereon from now until the end of time as belonging to all goblins. I further declare that all prisoners held within these walls will be kept by the Goblin nation as agreed upon until terms can be established with the human Ministry of Magic and our Goblin council to contain such persons indefinitely.”

With the formal oath complete, Harry and Rack-N-Stack shook hands to seal it. When their hands touched, another bright light flashed over the island and when it faded the goblins began to chant.

Harry stepped back with his friends and slipped an arm around Ginny’s shoulders. She leaned into his embrace and wrapped an arm around his waist while they watched a sight never before seen by human eyes.

It was beautiful and awe inspiring. The chanting grew stronger and louder and then suddenly stopped. Rack-N-Stack smiled broadly and the goblins that had accompanied him let out a roaring cheer.

Ginny, Harry, Remus and Tonks had never seen such a torrent of emotions from the grim goblins let alone ever heard of something like this. They were certainly happy to be a part of such a rare occasion. They watched as Rack-N-Stack gave orders to a few goblins who then broke the rest of the goblins into teams and set off to begin their work.

When Harry turned around to watch, he was amazed at the sight before him. The once dark and ominous prison had transformed. The damage the battle had wrought was still visible, but the prison was alight with glowing runes. It was no match to the ones he had seen in his cell or in Gringotts. These were absolutely magnificent and he could feel the magic pulsing from them. He looked to the goblin ruler but he only grinned at him in return and with a slight nod set off to oversee the reformation of their hallowed ground.

“Mr. Potter, if you will follow me please, we have healers that will tend to your wounds and that of your friends.” An unknown goblin requested startling them all out of their reverie.

“Thankyou.. ah....Mr....”

“Just Trayslammer, Mr. Potter.”

“Trayslammer, please call me Harry. This is Ginny Weasley, Remus Lupin and Nymphadora Tonks but just call her Tonks.” Harry introduced.

“We would be grateful for your aid.” Remus added.

The goblin nodded and turned to lead the way over to a group of 10 goblins. After the few cuts and bruises they had were healed, they thanked the goblins one last time before apparating back to their sanctuary.

A/N: Thanks to all of you still interested in my story. Once again I apologize for the lateness of this update. The last several months have been hectic. I am hoping to get another chapter up by Christmas as I am reviewing it right now. Thanks again. Meurysan

## Chapter 23—Reparations Abound

A/N: Once again I must ensure everyone that I'm not abandoning this story. It's always on my mind. Thanks to those that review and I'll keep trying to update sooner than I have been.

They all arrived at the Shrieking Shack exhausted and sank into the comfortable couches around the blazing fire in the hearth. Ginny cuddled up next to Harry as he slipped an arm around her shoulders. Tonks did much the same with Remus and they sat in silence contemplating the events of the evening.

No matter how many times he fought or how many battles he lived through, it was always difficult to reconcile the damage done and lives lost. The objective, although achieved, always seemed diminished in the aftermath. They had to regroup and re-evaluate their goals in this war before they had to go out and do it all again. Like all soldiers' throughout the world and in history, they would do what must be done, but longed for the day it wouldn't be necessary.

Their silent contemplation was momentarily interrupted by the arrival of Dobby and Winky. They brought some sandwiches and a variety of drinks to help ease the weariness, but then quickly popped away.

Releasing Ginny, Harry poured out glasses for everyone and then leaned forward resting his elbows on his knees sipping thoughtfully at his drink. The tension seemed to grow in the silence and Harry needed to break it, he couldn't stand it anymore.

"I know this was a hard night on everyone and if you've decided to...leave...I won't hold it against you. It won't get much easier until this war is over. I... will have to remove any memories you may have that will endanger my plan, but I'll understand. This is a lot to take on for anyone." He didn't expect the slap upside the back of his head as a response and turned to glare in surprise at the sparking red-head.

"Ow.."

"Harry James Potter, how could you be so daft? After what happened tonight how could you even think we would back out! We're

committed to ending this war just as you are. We were committed to last night and we all pulled through. We know it won't be easy, it isn't easy, but we're going to see it to the end." Looking around the room two other heads nodded in agreement. "We won Harry, it wasn't easy and it wasn't pretty but we won. That's something that hasn't happened in a long time against Voldemort. I've thought long and hard about this and I know Tonks and Moony have too. I can't say how I'm going to respond to things that haven't happened yet, but we'll work through them. We need to take care of each other so we can deal with whatever happens."

"Ginny's right Harry. War is never easy and it's hard on everyone. None of us can say with certainty how we are going to react in any situation until we are faced with it head on. The best we can do, is continue to train the best we can. There is something to be said for training your body to react instinctively. That's what the Aurors use in their initial training, but I think a lot of it is lost on them after they graduate the academy." Remus responded, trying to make his point.

"The Auror Department doesn't really have a recurring training program to keep Aurors in shape and ready to fight. That's why they were hurt so badly tonight. I saw a lot of familiar faces fall tonight and that could've been prevented. Even Kingsley got hit, but I think he's okay. I didn't see too many Order members around which concerns me. Didn't they take the warning we sent seriously? Or perhaps someone intercepted it? Maybe the big bird trusted someone else's information more? I just don't get it. The Ministry responded en-force but the Order seemed surprised when they arrived." Tonks questioned not sure why things happened the way they did.

"I've been thinking the same questions. There's a lot that doesn't fit. I have to confirm what I'm about to say, but I believe Snape didn't pass on the information we expected him to, which means he's not truly a spy for Dumbledore. If the greasy git purposefully slimmed down the stats for the attack, we have the proof needed that the man is truly aligned with Voldemort and is a threat to the rest of us. We could pass that information on to Dumbles but I don't think even that proof will be enough to convince him of Snape's true intentions. It may come down to us removing him from the picture for a while, but we'd have to avert suspicions from the Death Eaters and Voldemort. That

greasy bat sure has a knack for positioning himself and making it hard to get at him, that's for sure."

"Well, it was easy in school, but that was a long time ago. Do you think we should track him?" Remus asked.

"Not for right now, I need him to feel comfortable, that no one is onto him. If he feels safe, there's more probability of letting something slip that could help us. What we need to concentrate on now, is the reactions to what has happened at Azkaban."

"Do you think they'll figure out what happened tonight?"

"They will eventually Gin, to what extent I'm not sure or even if they'll be able to do it on their own. Right now I want to give the goblins as much time as possible to secure the island before anything happens. From what they tell me it shouldn't take any more than a month for everything to be full up. They've got some pretty impressive measures they're installing out there. In two days time, anyone wanting access to the island won't be able to find it without a goblin escort. It's a variation of the Fidelius charm. No matter how many times you've been there you'll always need a goblin escort to get there. All the goblins have sworn a binding oath never to reveal the location or escort anyone that has not been approved by the Goblin Council. No exceptions. Pretty amazing huh?"

"Yes it is. There is a lot we can learn from them as well as others if we'd just get over all the prejudices!" Remus remarked.

"That's the main issue, but there are more subtle ones as well. Even Dumbledore propagates the problems. Whether intentional or not, I can't be sure. I really don't think that's his aim, but it still happens."

"His manipulations are going to wind up backfiring on him one day. What makes it worse is his use of Hogwarts in all this. The Wizengamot is bad enough, but It's expected in politics. Using Hogwarts is just destroying the school and the future leaders of this world."



"I'm glad someone other than me sees it Moony. Dumbledore's meddling has already backfired on him although he may not realize it. I'm not sure he'll be able to recover from all this really when he does. He's not used to things being out of his controlled and simple planning and he's losing major footholds the more he tries to regain what he's lost. He's still looking for me even though it's been proven over and over that he won't find me. He doesn't even recognize the fact that I'm a legal adult and don't answer to him. I don't think I will be able to go back to Hogwarts as I had originally planned. I don't need that fight escalating within the school, and I know Dumbledore is probably just desperate enough to try something illegal to get me back under control."

"You think he'd really go that far cub?"

"Yeah Remus, I do."

"Harry, how are you going to complete your studies then? Without NEWTs ....."

"Actually Ginny, Harry can schedule them with the Ministry if he feels he's ready. Any student can, it's just the risk of taking them too early that keeps most people from doing that. That's how home schooled individuals graduate without ever stepping foot into one of the magical schools around the world." Tonks injected quickly.

"Is there a way to schedule them without the entire world knowing I'm taking them?"

"It's supposed to be confidential until that is you're finished with the exams. They're public record after being graded. With the leaks within the ministry though I can't guarantee that."

"Well I do have a few favors owed me by the current minister, maybe I could cash in on that to ensure there won't be any problems. Do you think you and Moony could talk to her about scheduling the exams for me?"

"Make that for both of us Harry. I can't go back after all that's happened and what we still have left to do. I need to be able to move

around legally and I can't do that unless I complete my NEWTs." Ginny added, or actually demanded quite logically.

Harry thought about this for a while before speaking. He noticed Ginny's worried expression and knew she thought he would disagree with her. Logically she had more than a valid point. He was anxious about letting her participate, but she had already proven herself many times over with her dedication to training and now in battle. He knew he could trust her with his life but his emotional side couldn't bare to see her hurt. Without her though, it would be more difficult.

The only conclusion he could come up with was to continue training to make sure she would survive. Although it wasn't a guarantee, neither was sending he back to Hogwarts. Hell, there were really no guarantees in life, he'd have to make the best choice possible and prepare. Finally he answered the silence that had fallen around them.

"I may not like it for personal reasons, but I have to agree with you Gin. Your disappearance is suspect and if you return, you're likely to be guarded 24/7 and questioned around the clock. Not that I don't think you couldn't resist all that, but there's much more that you can do to help the rest of us. You're more than ready to take the NEWTs. Moony, do you think we could get this set up?"

"Since you're of age Harry it shouldn't be a problem. Ginny however is a different issue altogether. She isn't of age to make her own decisions, which means we'll have to get permission from her parents in order to schedule the exams for her. We could forge something, but if they found out they could protest the exams and then we would all be facing charges."

Ginny who was finding it hard to conceal her excitement at Harry's consent, now looked crestfallen.

"Let me scout out the issue." Tonks proposed, not be able to stand the fact that Ginny would be facing problems because of her family. Overall it really wouldn't matter too much, they had all gotten around the ministry so far and would continue to do so if needed. If anything should happen though, they would have a lot to answer for. "We all know the Weasley's have left the Order. It might not be as hard as we

think. Let me ask a few questions of the boys before we make a decision either way.”

“I’m not sure Tonks. I don’t trust Dumbledore to stay out of it. The Weasley’s have been a major player in the Order up until now and in other ... activities. I don’t trust them.”

“We understand Harry, and you have ample reason to support how you feel. I am more than angry at what my family has done including my part in all of it, but if they’ve truly left the Order it says a lot. Tonks could contact my brothers and feel out where they stand. I at least would like to know where their loyalty lies.”

“Let me think about it please? If we do approach them, there will have to be some sort of disclosure about what is going on, and I’m not to sure about involving anyone else in all this just yet. The more who know, the bigger chance there is for information to get out.”

“True Harry, but if we were to enact a binding or a wizards oath they couldn’t reveal anything.”

“True Tonks, but I don’t like the idea of running around gathering so many oaths, it feels almost ridiculous if you think about it.”

“Harry, we aren’t running around gathering oaths. You’re being a little overdramatic don’t you think? Let Tonks at least talk to Bill. He would be a good judge on where my family stands. If she doesn’t get a good answer from him, then we’ll figure something else out. If she does, then we may be a little better off and may have some hidden support. There is a lot my family could do to help us out if they were on our side.”

Harry thought about it and the pros and cons warred within his mind. He didn’t want to involve the Weasley’s for several reasons, the biggest being the trust they had destroyed. However, Ginny made logical arguments. She was attached to her family strongly, but could at the same time step back and regard them critically when needed. Her strength was amazing to him. What could it hurt to talk to Bill? Tonks wouldn’t reveal anything important and he trusted her.

“Alright, Tonks, you can talk to Bill. Just make sure you don’t tell him too much.”

Ginny engulfed him in a tight hug and Tonks squealed in pleasure like a little girl who had just received a puppy. Remus laughed at the whole spectacle even though it was obvious he was relieved with the whole decision.

“Right you lot. I’m tired and have a lot to do yet before I can get some sleep. Why don’t you all go to bed and get some rest. After I return I plan on sleeping for a whole day.”

“Actually Harry, I plan on attending an Order meeting sometime soon. I haven’t gotten word yet when but I’m assuming it’s going to be soon. It would look a little suspicious if I didn’t show up.”

“Watch Snape closely! I expect James Roper will have to make an appearance soon.”

“Righto Harry.” She said in a falsely chipper voice. Her and Remus got up and left.

Harry kissed Ginny tenderly before heading off for his next excursion before he could get some much needed rest.

“Be careful Harry.”

“I will Gin. I think old Voldy will be too interested in cursing his failed Death Eater’s who planned this jaunt than me.”

“I just wish I could take your place tonight.”

“Not yet Ginny. Tonks does a fair job but even some of her latent abilities show too much to take the risk of her going often. We don’t need them catching on to what we’re up to.”

The sight at the ministry wasn’t a pretty one. Upon arrival Dumbledore, Moody and Montgomery were met by a hopeful Minister Bones. Her countenance darkened upon seeing their ragged state.

“What happened? Is Azkaban safe?” she questioned. Before Albus could answer, Moody spoke up gruffly.

“We retreated from Azkaban. The prison is no longer under ministry control.”

Amelia was shocked to her core. “How could this happen? What of the Aurors I sent? What about the Order? I assume from your presence Albus that you joined in the fighting?”

“We did indeed join the battle, but we were outnumbered by the Death Eater forces. Your Aurors are assisting the wounded we were able to get out to St. Mungos. Right now there are more urgent matters to attend to. I suspect James Roper was on the island helping the Death Eaters.”

This pronouncement stunned not only the minister but Moody as well.

“Did you see him Albus? All I saw was that mysterious wizard whose been fighting the mangy muts since the summer.”

“No I did not see him my friend, but that is irrelevant at the moment.”

“I disagree,” Amelia interrupted, “If you did not see Mr. Roper than how can you be certain he was helping the Dark Forces let alone proving that he was even there in the first place.”

“That’s just it. The Mysterious Wizard is James Roper my friends, they are one in the same.”

“Albus I think you have truly lost it.”

Dumbledore glared at his long time friend, and took a deep breath to regain his composure. “Do you not see the connection?”

“I see the connection you are trying to draw here Headmaster Dumbledore, but I do not agree with you. Your obsession with Mr. Roper has gone on for too long and has caused much discord within the ministry. Where is your proof that he is assisting the Death Eaters? How do you connect a wizard that has fought against them

all of a sudden helping them? Not only are you flawed in that logic, but you insist on disparaging the current Goblin Ambassador. Even if James Roper were this mysterious wizard you keep naming, how does he fit into this dark conspiracy theory you have worked into your head? I am not as ready as you seem to be in accusing anyone, let alone the ambassador with duplicity and treason and inciting a war with the goblins we cannot afford.”

Amelia Bones held up her hand as Albus opened his mouth to speak. “I will not entertain anymore speculation on this. We already have one enemy to counter and we should..... ” she trailed off as Aurors started popping into the ministry in various stages of disrepair.

Moody and Montgomery sprang into action stunning the already dazed men and women, taking out the threat before there was one. Albus was only a moment behind them in reacting to their sudden appearances, but as more arrived he became more confused as did the minister herself.

The end count was 32 stunned Aurors, Aurors that had been sent to Azkaban to combat the Death Eater attack. After further investigation of the unconscious individuals, Moody and Montgomery found portkeys on each and every one of them. They were the same portkeys used by the mysterious wizard during the summer to deliver Death Eaters to the Ministry.

Albus revived his arguments to the consternation of all and was summarily dismissed in his efforts. Yes it was somewhat shaky proof that the Mysterious Wizard had been at Azkaban, it did not prove he was with Voldemort. Why would Voldemort send potential prisoners back to the ministry and healed at that!? It didn’t make any sense, but then again nothing did at the moment. Albus left in a huff, while Amelia directed ministry workers in specific actions she wanted taken. Moody and Montgomery were put in charge of finding out what was going on with the wizarding prison.

Far away in a torch lit stone chamber, Voldemort sat imperiously listening to the disturbing reports of the Death Eaters that had abandoned the attack on Azkaban. He could smell the fear rolling off his followers in droves and he reveled in it, but was also enraged that

it wasn't caused by him. They would rather face the rage of their master in failure than die in battle, this was not acceptable!

As he listened, his anger grew exponentially. It was clear his followers had a greater fear than of failing their Lord and Master. The fact that it was instilled by another wizard, one that nothing was known about almost sent him over the edge. The damned wizard had shown himself and tipped the balance towards the ministry, causing his followers to name him as the greatest wizard to ever live. He would have to strike back fiercely to suppress this and show to the world he was the most powerful. It would be a difficult undertaking and with the lack of resources on his side was high on near impossible.

Not only had he lost Azkaban, but a significant amount of his army in the process. If he could believe the reports of his followers, the side of light had somehow recruited creatures of dark and illegal natures to fight for them. How they were able to succeed in an area he had failed was anyone's guess, but he surmised it had something to do with this unknown wizard. He now had too many unknowns running around out of control. The unknown wizard that no one seemed to know anything about or actually get a look at, and the new Goblin Ambassador James Roper.

Both were enigmas that couldn't be cracked at the moment. Initially he dismissed the ambassador as any type of threat, but now that he thought about it more, the man did have certain, connections that would be of good use.

He had two things going for him right now. One was that Harry Potter had removed himself from the picture for a while. Sure he had tasked 'special' forces to find the boy, but he was not a priority threat. The whelp would be eliminated as soon as he was found.

Second, Dumbledore was losing status in the wizarding world. Through his own machinations, he was showing the world he was not as perfect as they once thought. He was not the pure light wizard that could do no wrong. No, he was showing his faults and that was not tolerated in someone of his stature and reputation.

His next attack would have to incorporate some semblance of these two advantages, exploiting a weak point somewhere in the ministry or at Hogwarts. The biggest danger to his plans was and had been since this summer, the mysterious wizard who kept thwarting his every move.

The ministry had maintained control of Azkaban because of the man and succeeded in diminishing his reputation along with it. He couldn't understand where everything went wrong even with the appearance of the unknown wizard. The attack had been planned meticulously by his most trusted inner circle members. Even his spy had performed admirably in his double role, but somehow the Ministry and Dumbledore's blasted Order still had been ready for it.

Briefly he contemplated another spy amongst the ranks, but dismissed it as quickly as it came. The real problem kept coming back to the new chess piece on the board, the "Mysterious Wizard" as the papers were calling him. Snape reported that Dumbledore believed that this man and James Roper were one in the same, but he couldn't see the logic behind it. From what Lucius had reported on James Roper, he was an insignificant power hungry politician that was able to sway the Goblin Nation with smooth words and gestures.

There was something off with that report. From what he knew of the goblins, they didn't trust easily and were almost impossible to impress. No matter how he got there, James Roper was in a very powerful and influential position within the wizard economy. He would have Lucius step up his investigation on the man and find out which side he was on.

Tired of the groveling and Death Eaters before him, he returned to the present and shot two death curses in quick succession at the morbid excuses of wizards before him. "REMOVE THEM!" he ordered and then turned to his inner circle. "Lucius, I want more information on James Roper. Persuade him it would be in his best interests to join our cause."

"Yes My Lord." Lucius replied bowing deeply.



An exhausted Albus Dumbledore returned to Hogwarts later that day hoping to find out more information from his Order members. He was already late for the meeting he had called earlier and wasn't in a very good mood after his encounter at the ministry. It seemed to be the case more often these days that he was out of sorts. James Roper seemed to be the cause of it all.

Entering the classroom he had designated for these meetings, he barely noticed the presence of Tonks. His spy was present and he was anxious for answers. Without any pretense, Dumbledore started in questioning his trusted agent Severus Snape.

"Severus, what happened? Are you well? You've had me worried my dear boy."

Severus grimaced internally at the reference to him as a boy. It angered him to be referred to as such. Voldemort didn't call him a boy! "I am fine headmaster and have come to relay the meeting I have just finished with the Dark Lord."

"Yes, I assumed as much. What are his plans now that he has control of Azkaban?" Albus asked wearily rubbing the bridge of his nose beneath his spectacles.

"Excuse me headmaster? There are no plans as the ministry is still in control there. The Dark Lord is furious that his plans have been ruined yet again." Severus stated slightly confused and not able to hide it in his usual manner.

Dumbledore's eyes shot up and he straightened his stance. Eyeing Severus hard, he contemplated this latest news. Severus couldn't be lying to him. If Voldemort didn't have the prison and neither did the ministry than whom?

"Headmaster are you alright?" Minerva questioned, a little wary of what mood he was in now.

"I am fine Minerva." He answered as his eyes swept around the other order members. "This news is disturbing, for I have just returned from the ministry and they do not have control of Azkaban either. In fact all

the Aurors that were still alive after the battle were returned by portkey to the ministry with most of their wounds healed. Their memories however, of how that happened were jumbled and random. We had assumed that Voldemort ordered them returned as a message to the ministry. Tell me Severus, does Voldemort know anything else?"

"No sir, although he is currently trying to seek an alliance with James Roper, the Goblin Ambassador."

"He is?" Dumbledore was surprised by this measure but somewhat reassured that it wasn't a forgone conclusion as to which side the man was on. He would have to look into that more. "And what of Harry Potter? What are his plans concerning the boy?"

"The Dark Lord did not mention anything about Potter." Snape replied in a strained manner, biting back his usual snide comments. "He is more concerned in gaining useful allies than worrying about some wet nose school boy."

"Well I'd say that's good then." Minerva spoke up. "If he's not worried about him, then Harry should be safe."

"Yes, well it does give us more time to locate Mr. Potter and bring him back where he is protected."

"I believe your efforts should be focused on this man that Voldemort wants at his side Headmaster. He presents a far greater threat than an insignificant powerless adolescent." Severus spat out.

"For once I agree with Snape. At least about the power James Roper could potentially wield. If Voldemort were to get him on his side, the wizarding economy would fall on its ear." Moody weighed in. "We'd be better off getting to him before Voldemort does. I would suggest however, that it be someone other than yourself that talks to the man."

"We may already be too late in that regard my dear friend. I still believe that James Roper and the mysterious wizard are one in the same. I don't know what he's playing at, but I do not trust him."

“All right Albus, that’s quite enough. This is getting ridiculous. Your spy here says that Voldemort hasn’t got any more information than we do about this mysterious wizard, and hasn’t until now started thinking about approaching Roper. How in the bowels of Hades do you make your connections?! You honestly think Voldemort is pulling one big prank on all of us? Maybe he’s misleading his spy? If he is Albus, there’s more danger to Severus and others than you think.”

“I agree with Alastor on this one Albus. While you may have your differences of opinions, the goblins would not so easily turn themselves over to V-V- Voldemort. They know best the trickery the Dark Lord utilizes. I am not one to judge Albus, but your personal issues aside, do you really think the goblins so naive?”

“Minerva, we have been through this before. Trust me!” Dumbledore pleaded to the entire group wearily.

The others looked on perplexed. Mundungus spoke up from the back of the room, “Well if Voldie don’t have Azkaban and the Ministry don’t have it, who does?”

The next few days were hectic for the ministry, well... everyone but Harry and his team. The Daily Prophet had covered the news concerning Azkaban and as usual didn’t come close to printing the truth. Various factions in the government were hotly debating what to do about the issue at hand, while others were pointing fingers and placing blame. The under flowing current in the situation turned out to be that no one really knew who had control of the wizard prison, but more importantly they couldn’t remember where it was.

The goblins were able to move quicker since the focus was off of them. The new wards were up and they were moving rapidly in the restoration of the ancient goblin city. Rack’n’sack had invited Harry and his friends to return in December when the restoration would be complete. On behalf of the others, Harry enthusiastically accepted. Until then they would continue to train and plan.

Tonks began seeking out Bill Weasley to figure out where the family stood. Besides being the oldest, Bill always seemed to have a level

head about things. That's not to say he didn't have the infamous Weasley temper, he just thought things through better than the others. If Bill blew his top, there was a damn good reason behind it.

His position with the goblins was not as good as they had been because of his affiliation with Dumbledore's secret Order. Even though he had explained to his supervisors that he had ceased all contact with the Order, the goblins were still suspicious. It was for this reason that he was subjected to performing menial tasks within the bank and Tonks was able to find him easily.

Bill proved he was smarter than most by immediately starting off the conversation with a magical oath to keep anything said between them secret unless agreed by both to talk to others. He also cast several privacy and security charms to prevent anyone from overhearing. This all surprised Tonks but impressed her greatly.

After the first shock, their conversation quickly turned to the main topic. She was surprised to learn that the entire family, minus Ron, believed Ginny to be with Harry wherever he was hiding. They trusted Harry to take care of her as they had learned their lesson the hard way, they wouldn't betray Harry's trust again or underestimate his potential and maturity. The boy had been through too much and needed people on his side, which apparently the Weasley's were now.

Tonks was relieved, not only for herself, but for Harry and Ginny. It still might be a little tricky but she had some firm ground to stand on now. She explained what she could to Bill to relay to the family and asked about the NEWT exams that Ginny wanted to take. Bill promised he would talk to everyone and meet up with Tonks later to relay their decision. He also asked her to deliver a letter to Ginny for him. After checking it thoroughly she accepted it and left to report back to the others.

November progressed quickly. The Ministry was frantic, Dumbledore was frantic and Voldemort was enraged. When the Dark Lord learned from Snape that the Ministry did not have control of Azkaban he sent Death Eaters' to find out who did. They came back empty handed. No matter how much he punished his followers, he could gain no further results. No one seemed to remember where the fortress was. Adding

to his frustration was the lack of progress in the search for the mysterious wizard and Lucius' failed attempts to recruit James Roper. All that he had heard was that James Roper would not align himself with either of the 2 factions in the war. He assumed this meant the man was aligned with the mysterious wizard, but what side was that man on? This was not turning out as planned. There were too many unknowns surfacing. Dumbledore and the Ministry were clear cut against him but new factors weren't so clear. Harry Potter also seemed to be out of the picture but he didn't know for how long or where the boy stood. Voldemort didn't know which way to turn anymore.

The students of Hogwarts were in a state nearing barely suppressed panic. The Halloween Ball although a grand time, was only a momentary respite. The news of Azkaban had terrified them and shaken them like nothing else had so far. Paranoia was starting to make headway amongst the younger population of the wizarding world.

Hogwarts known as the most secure place in the wizarding world was no longer that. There was a foreboding sense of doom overshadowing everything. The rift between houses grew as no one knew who to trust and even the professors seemed more on edge. Although the holiday break was just around the corner, no one was feeling the usual festive spirits.

Hermione Granger noticed the lackluster atmosphere as she felt much the same but to a deeper degree. She was re-evaluating everything she had ever known and questioning her most basic beliefs. It seemed as if everything was crumbling down around her. Her professors although great wizards and witches in their own right were showing flaws she had never really been aware of before, especially the headmaster in whom she had placed unquestioning faith and loyalty. She had idolized the man, but now he had fallen off the pedestal she had placed him on.

Her books no longer brought her comfort. She finally realized Harry was right; books didn't contain the answers for life. Not everything fit in to the orderly defined rules contained in text. It was how you used the information you gained that was important. Up until now she

hadn't really applied anything she learned to her life, just to schoolwork. Grades really weren't everything after all.

Something she had said to Harry in their quest to save the Philosopher's stone ghosted back to her, "Harry—you're a great wizard, you know"

"I'm not as good as you,"

"Me!...Books! And Cleverness! There are more important things—friendship and bravery and....."

She was right then, but she hadn't listened to herself, instead she ate up all the lies others had fed her and look where that got her. She was almost worse off than when she had started Hogwarts. Except for Ron, she was friendless and alone.

Images flit through her mind, images that Harry had forced them to watch and she shuddered at how completely wrong she had been, how wrong they all had been. Her problem now was that she didn't know what to do. She had no one to turn to that she trusted for advice and Ron wouldn't listen.

Ron she knew, was affected by the images Harry had shown them, but disturbingly enough he somehow thought it was all made up. That it was all a way for Harry once again to get all the attention, the lime-light, he had called it. She didn't understand where this was all coming from but didn't want to press it. Logically he really could believe that or someone could have planted that in his mind and he didn't realize it. The thought didn't take too much imagination after what she had witnessed before with Dumbledore. The headmaster had brazenly raped their minds to get information without a care as to what they wanted or thought about it. Ron was a blind fool, but she still loved him and couldn't lose him. He was her blind fool.

Now with Azkaban lost and Dumbledore removed from his political positions, the Order was facing more dangerous times. In turn the chaos impacted the war as the order was no longer effective in retrieving useful information or thwarting attacks. In her heart she knew they were losing and she feared for the future of both of the

worlds to which she belonged. She hoped Harry could forgive them; he was their only hope to see the end of these terrible times.

Harry was nowhere to be found when Tonks returned to the Shrieking Shack after a lengthy and secret discussion with the Weasley's. Bill had been true to his word and had talked in length to his parents and brothers without Ron.

The result was pretty much as expected. They supported Harry and believed that Ginny was safe under his care. They were relieved however to have their suspicions confirmed by Tonks and even more so that both Tonks and Remus were with them as well. They desperately wanted to see both teens but Tonks couldn't promise anything until she had talked to Harry. She explained that it was hard enough to get him to agree with this meeting but did after thinking logically of all the reasons that were presented to him. That and he really wanted Ginny to be legal to practice her magic. The explanation of course brought up more questions which Tonks was unable to answer, but she promised once again to talk to Harry about what she could tell them in the future.

After three long hours of discussion, the Weasley's gave their written consent for Ginny to take her NEWTs but also gave magical oaths that they would not betray Harry or Ginny or reveal any information about Tonks and Remus's involvement. At the very least they were happy to have been given a mirror that when activated by Harry or Ginny would allow them to talk and see their daughter without worrying about security. Of course they would have to put up secrecy charms and such but it shouldn't be much trouble. On the sly, she casually mentioned that they might even look into asking the goblins to override the Fidelius charm that Dumbledore had put around the Burrow and replace it with one of their own making which was much stronger and didn't have strings attached. She left them thinking deeply about what she implied with that statement.

Ginny was ecstatic to hear the news from her family, and together with Remus and Tonks worked on a plan to get their NEWTs scheduled secretly.

Harry arrived back in the middle of the conversation looking quite exhausted. Slumping down on the couch he leaned his head back closing his eyes. Wearily he rubbed his face as the others watched and waited patiently for him to explain what happened.

The young man looked as if he was about to fall asleep when Ginny sidled up to him and ran her fingers through his sweat dampened hair. "Harry? What happened?" she asked gently.

Harry peeped one eye open at her then closed it again taking a deep breath. A few more seconds of silence followed and Ginny became a bit anxious that something terrible had happened.

Harry stood and took off his outer cloak throwing it over the side armrest then sank back down and pulled Ginny to him. "Voldemort is planning something and I can't get it out of him. All I know is that Snape's involved somehow. I can't get close enough to that greasy bat to determine what he's planning. He's taken Moody's warning of Constant Vigilance to new heights!" he said, frustration obvious in his voice.

"Harry, let me work it out of that smarmy weed. I'm sure they'll be another order meeting soon and I can try my hand at reading him."

"No Tonks, I don't think that will work." He sighed.

"Why not Harry? You know we're all proficient now." Ginny questioned confused at his reluctance.

"It's not that Gin. Snape's gone missing. According to what I've been able to get from Voldemort, he ordered Snape to plan a mission that would wreak havoc in the wizarding world and wanted no one to know about it until the last minute, not even himself. Snape was to make excuses to Dumbledore and then isolate himself until he had the plan worked out. Voldemort doesn't even know where the bastard is! I should've listened to you all before and put a tracker on him." Harry nearly shouted and leaned forward resting his aching head in his hands.



“We’ll figure it out Harry. Snape’s smart but he’s no genius.” Remus tried to reassure.

Harry only nodded. The group sat in silence for a while as Harry regained his composure. Ginny rubbed his back soothingly and Harry was grateful for the calming effect it had on him. Slightly turning his head, he smiled up at her. For about the thousandth time he swore to whatever powers that be that he was thankful for the beautiful young woman.

Ginny returned the smile and blew him a kiss which earned chuckles from Tonks and Remus. Harry sat up and pulled Ginny onto his lap and she snuggled in to him.

“So what did I interrupt?” He knew he was changing the subject but didn’t want to dwell on the disturbing possibilities Snape’s new orders brought.

Ginny pounced on the chance to explain everything to Harry. He was relieved at the news and his heart lightened at the Weasley’s show of support. He was also glad that now Ginny couldn’t get in trouble with the ministry if she was ever caught or recognized while they were out.

Remus and Tonks added their inputs to set up the tests and planned on talking to Madame Bones as soon as possible. Harry agreed with their plan although he was still quite nervous about it all.

At the ministry, Remus and Tonks had a bit of trouble getting in to see the minister. Luckily they had spotted Kingsley Shacklebolt before he saw them which allowed them to disguise themselves and take an alternative route up to the minister’s office. Conveniently enough, this also allowed them to bypass the wand check point without any problems.

When they arrived at the office, they were notified that the minister was in a very important meeting with the heads of divisions and would not be available until tomorrow. This did not meet with their plans in the slightest. Nodding politely to the secretary they walked out of the office and ducked around the corner into a small broom cupboard. Remus winked at Tonks and turned invisible indicating

they were going with plan B to see the minister. Tonks laughed quietly before following suit.

The guards didn't flinch as they passed by and they only had a small problem slipping past the robust wards around the office. The meeting of the Division Heads was more like a school ground fight. To say they were in a panic was an understatement. They truly didn't think the reaction would be this bad but then maybe they had once again placed more faith in the people running the ministry than they should have.

Amidst the shouting, Amelia bones sat quietly at her desk as if waiting for them to finish. She couldn't understand how it had all come to this. She felt a tap on her shoulder and looked around, but there was no one close to her. Shrugging it off, she continued to watch and wait. Another tap was felt, but still no one was visible. Her heart started racing, someone was here that shouldn't be!

A scroll unraveled in from of her unnoticed by the others still shouting at each other. Writing started appearing and she read quickly what was there. Abruptly she stood and with a quick bang from her wand the shouting stopped. Everyone looked at the stern looking minister and realized she had had enough, and now wasn't the time to challenge her.

"That will be quite enough. I had called you all here to decide what we should do next, not squabble like children. I am ending this meeting until you can all discuss matters like civilized adults. I suggest you all take the time to consider your actions and come up with something useful. We will talk again two hours hence."

The division heads stood stunned and a little sheepish as they filed past and out of the office. When the last person left, Tonks made a sweep of the room to make sure it was clear. Finding no hidden listening or recording devices, she signaled Remus who made himself visible again and silently enjoyed the shock he caused the minister. He wasn't a marauder for no reason.

Amelia had to sit as she felt her strength wane from her body in shock. She was glad she was seated when Nymphadora Tonks revealed herself as well. Then she became angry.

“What is the meaning of this?!”

“We are sorry to interrupt minister, but we have urgent business with you as the note stated.” Remus started.

“I hardly believe that setting up NEWTs is urgent business Mr. Lupin even if it did give me an adequate excuse to end that useless meeting.” She stated sternly with a hint of amusement.

“Please hear us out Minister.” Tonks pleaded. “This has to do with Harry Potter and Ginny Weasley. But before we tell you more, we need an unbreakable vow from you not to tell a living soul what we will tell you.”

“This is absurd! Auror Tonks I demand you explain yourself now!”

“I’m sorry minister, but my oath to Harry outweighs any oaths I took for the ministry.”

“You are an Auror and owe your allegiance to the wizarding world at large, how can an oath to a mere teenage boy outweigh all that? At the very least this is a violation of your duties and a conflict of interest. You could lose your job and face time in prison for this.”

Tonks did not like where this was going but would not betray Harry. If she had to, she’d go on the run as her favorite cousin had. Ironical that this meeting was to alleviate that type of situation for one of the group but put another in the same rut.

Remus was getting angry. Amelia was never this ruthless and downright menacing before. What had happened to cause her to react so violently to such a simple request. “Please Amelia, this is really important and could save the wizarding world. You may not know it but the outcome of this war rests on Harry’s shoulders, the mere boy you so eloquently dismissed has more involvement than

you yourself do. That is why Tonks holds her oath to Harry so high. I cannot tell you more until you swear the oath.” Remus cut in.

Amelia scrutinized the two. Tonks was nodding for her to accept the oath with a pleading look in her eyes. She sighed and looked back at Lupin, he was part of Dumbledore’s Order and wasn’t sure if she could trust him, but what he said was intriguing. It insinuated there was something that Dumbledore had not told her even though he was adamant he was telling her everything when they talked. It may be in the ministry’s best interest to hear them out, but an oath? Curiosity was killing her; Dumbledore had always had a particular obsession with the boy savior but never elaborated on why. Here stood Remus, offering her what Albus would not give. Even if it was only about NEWTs, something would be gained. Why would Harry Potter want to take his exams early and how was he ready for them so quickly after his time in Azkaban? Why did he want to keep them secret, unless he didn’t want certain individuals to know, possibly a certain headmaster?

“Alright.” She said eyeing the two. “But if you are just wasting my time.....”

“We’re not!” Remus once again cut in. “Believe me minister; I’m sure you will not regret it.”

Walking around her desk she held out her hand and Tonks proceeded with the vow. Remus then proceeded to tell her about the prophecy and Harry’s role in it. He also gave her insight into Harry’s life that had been kept from everyone but Dumbledore’s secret Order. She felt that there was something very important being left out of the story, but didn’t say anything. The boy was powerful and if he was to take down Voldemort, she would help him anyway she could. It was the least she could do after all the wrongs that had been dealt him. It was also surprising to hear about the most recent events leading up to his withdrawal from school and the subsequent withdrawal of Miss Weasley with the approval of her family. Further, the withdrawal of the Weasley family from the secret order caused her great concern. Not that she was worried about the Order, but it implied some significant disagreement in the way things were being done. The Weasley’s were always a very upright sort and to leave someone that

they had outwardly and vigilantly supported for a very long time meant there was something drastically wrong.

When it came out that not only Harry would be taking his NEWTs but Miss Weasley as well she didn't know what to think. She had her parents blessing which was all that was required, but she was worried that the teenage girl would not be ready. When she stated her worries to Tonks and Remus they just smirked mischievously and told her there were no worries. Well, if Mr. Potter was ready in such a short time it was possible Miss Weasley would be too, but how?

"Very well, I know there is more to this than you are letting on. I would like to talk to Mr. Potter and Miss Weasley before their tests begin. I will set up a portkey that will transport them directly to the testing division when required. Madame Crenshaw and Mr. Bagshanks will be able to proctor all the exams and will take oaths to keep their identities secret. However, you do realize that once the tests are completed and scored, their results become a matter of public record? They will be considered full fledged members of the society so long as they pass."

"That is what we are aiming for Madame Bones. But since no one will know that they took the tests, they won't be looking for the results. By the time it does become known it won't matter. Ginny and Harry will not have to return to Hogwarts and they'll be capable of training for the final battle, without any hindrances." Tonks said.

"Very well then. The only question is when they would be willing to sit the exams?"

"The week before Christmas would work fine. I would like to pick up the portkey personally if you don't mind, for security reasons only." Remus requested, pleased they had come to an agreement.

"I will have it ready by the Friday before the exams and will give it to you personally. Stop by my office before closing. I assume you will be able to get in without being seen?"

Remus and Tonks chuckled and nodded in the affirmative but wouldn't say anything else. "Thank you Madame Bones and in

gratitude, I would like to pass on a bit of advice. Talk to the goblins about your problems. If you treat them with respect, you may be surprised at how easily some of your problems may vanish.” Remus stated cryptically.

Amelia’s eyes grew wide in surprise but couldn’t say anything further as the two vanished as quickly as they had arrived. She wasted no time in sitting down and penning a request to speak with the goblin ambassador.

Remus and Tonks immediately headed back to inform Harry and Ginny of their discussion. After sharing the pensieve memory Harry left for Gringotts.

It was not an uncommon sight to see goblins in Gringotts, but within the ministry building itself the contingent guarding the Goblin Ambassador created quite a stir. No one seemed to know just why they were there. It wasn’t until the Minister herself appeared with a contingent of her own that speculations started flying and the word quickly spread.

Amelia Bones wasted little time in the lobby before escorting both contingents to a more secure part of the ministry. She knew without a doubt that the building would soon be flooded with reporters trying to get a story. Once everyone was seated and the proper courtesies extended she got right down to business.

“Ambassador Roper, am I to assume by your immediate response to my inquiry to the Goblin Council that there is indeed business to discuss?”

“You may assume that there is indeed discussions that need to take place, but I am curious as to the specifics of such.” Roper amiably replied.

“I was given a cryptic message from a source that will remain anonymous that I should talk to the goblins about the situation we now face with Azkaban.”

Roper only inclined his head in acknowledgement, causing Amelia and the other witches and wizards present to grow frustrated.

“We have received further information that He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named does not have control of the prison.”

If she expected the goblin representatives to be surprised she was sorely mistaken, which only added to her frustration.

“Frankly my dear ambassador I am at a loss. Neither the Dark forces nor the ministry has control over Azkaban and I do not understand how the goblins are entangled in all this.” She said giving up her pretense of control and gesturing wildly with her hands.

James Roper regarded those present calmly for a few minutes before reaching into his satchel and retrieving a scroll.

“This,” he said pointing the scroll towards the minister, “should answer most of your questions.” He then levitated the scroll across the table until it floated ominously in front of her.

Amelia stared at the scroll as if trying to decipher its contents without touching it.

“I assure you Madame, there is nothing harmful contained within the scroll.” Roper prompted.

Quickly the minister’s eyes shifted from the scroll to Roper and back. Curiosity won out in the end and she opened the scroll and read avidly. Just by looking at the contortions her face was going through, one could tell she was less than pleased.

“What is the meaning of this? How could....I demand an explanation!” she shouted indignantly.

“The scroll is genuine and in accordance with the laws of the ministry of magic, and sealed by magic itself. Azkaban belongs to the goblins. There is no further explanation required or owed. However, the goblin council has authorized me to open negotiations with your ministry in

deciding terms agreeable to both parties in maintaining prisoners upon their domain.”

While James Roper had issued the opening for negotiations and remained calm, the ministry officials present reacted in the direct opposite. Outraged accusations flew at the goblin contingent, a few bordering on declaring outright war. James was glad that his ‘escorts’ were so well trained and didn’t respond. They seemed to take their queue from his own outwardly calm demeanor. Inside he was laughing at the show. These adults, some considered the wisest of the wizarding world, were throwing temper tantrums worthy of a 2 year old.

Harry wasn’t worried about them trying something; the goblin guard was really only a cover for their presence and didn’t seem out of place considering previous dealings with the ministry. If they tried anything James and the others would be gone and the Wizengamot would be in a very difficult way for, well, quite a long while.

Once again Madame Bones had to resort to extreme measures to regain control of the errant meeting. She gave each member a baleful glare then turned back to the ambassador.

“Ambassador Roper by virtue of the magic binding this scroll I can believe what it says is true, but it still does not explain how this has happened. Please explain.” The tone of her voice was not a question.

James could feel the offense the goblins took at her tone. Amelia needed to be reminded of her manners.

“Minister Bones, since you can see the scroll is true and legal according to your laws, the ‘how’ does not concern you, only that it has been done. At this point I see only two choices for you and your ministry. One, you either accept your new position and work with the goblin nation to establish terms for your use of Azkaban, which I remind you is not something they have to do but are willing to work with your government in order to establish security in the world. This option is beneficial to both our nations. Or, second you refuse to accept this, loose Azkaban, loose a great ally, and face the difficult situation of having nowhere to house criminals letting them run free in



Britain or painting a target on the ministry itself for opposing forces to attack in order to free their brethren. This option will force you into negotiations with other nations to possibly intern Britain's less favorable citizens which will be costly and potentially ill suited to benefit your ministry. The goblin nation has proven their willingness to work with the ministry of magic on numerous occasions but it has not been reciprocated. Have they not kept the wizarding economy safe? When was the last time they broke any agreements made between the ministry and their nation? Your own Wizengamot members have tried on several occasions to break agreements in recent years, so who is the trustworthy member in this deal? Think before you speak minister as there are consequences to any action taken. The goblins are willing to negotiate when they do not have to; there isn't much the ministry has to offer, but the goblins are offering their support. It is up to you to decide if you are willing to accept it." Roper finished but he didn't leave. He stood staring directly at the minister who seemed to slump defeated in her seat. Looking at the other members, she knew it would be difficult to sway old prejudices, but Roper was right. They needed help.

## Chapter 24 Turning up the Heat

Three days later, news hit the wizarding public that a new treaty had been signed between the Ministry and the Goblin Nation. It stipulated the use of Azkaban by the ministry to contain convicted criminals. No other details were reported, only speculation and here say. The biggest question in people's minds was how the goblins had control of the wizarding prison! Most believed it was a conspiracy cover up and gossip ran wild. Some came to the conclusion that the goblins had decided to revolt against the ministry knowing that in its weakened state it would be easy to overcome. Instead of fighting a third front, the Ministry had capitulated and given in to the goblin demands. Not many in the wizarding community knew their history very well, only what was condoned by the ministry's of the past and therefore didn't know the truth behind Azkaban. Never-the-less, the public was not happy with their government and protests broke out across Britain.

Minister Amelia Bones and the Ministry were hard pressed to maintain order. The Ministry building itself had been locked down to keep the chaotic crowds from entering and disrupting work even further. Restricted access was granted only to ministry employees and special identification tags, attuned to each individual's magical signature, were issued and checked upon entering or leaving the building. Any visitors had to request permission through the Auror department several days in advance in order to conduct any business at the ministry. Even after gaining permission, they were escorted throughout their stay by an Auror. To say the ministry was more secure now than it had ever been was an understatement. No one was getting in who shouldn't. These measures were not well received by those that used to have free reign to come and go like the press and certain influential individuals. Those individuals complained but the fact of the matter was that they didn't have any real business to conduct at the ministry and were therefore not allowed entrance.

With a secure base of operations free of Death Eater spies or conspirators, the Ministry was beginning to work more efficiently even though a bit slowly at regaining control beyond its walls.

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At his hidden base somewhere in Britain, Lord Voldemorts reaction was volatile and only witnessed by his foolishly loyal followers. Gathered en-masse, the Death Eater's watched in terror as their master vented his uncontrolled rage on the one person he held responsible for their lack of progress. Except for the hoarse screaming of Lucius Malfoy, the Death Eaters were silent, careful not to breathe too loud lest it attract the unwanted attention of their Lord and master. Lord Voldemort was not restraining himself as he usually did when punishing failures. They witnessed the truly horrifying and fascinating extent of knowledge he held of the Dark Arts. Not many had been privileged enough to see their Dark Lord in action and none wanted to see it turned on themselves. They pitied the once powerful and proud Malfoy for surely he would not survive the night. At the same time thoughts of taking over his position at the right hand of their Lord raced through their heads.

The fall from grace of Lucius Malfoy went without explanation and there really was no need for it, for all the Death Eaters had heard the many reasons for his current predicament. Malfoy had failed too many times for the Dark Lord to overlook anymore. Most knew it all started with the return of their Lord from the ether in which he had existed since the baby Potter had defeated him. Lucius as one of his most loyal should have sought out a way to return him to a physical form much sooner, but did not. No excuses were acceptable in the eyes of the Dark Lord. The debacle at the Department of Mysteries was also laid on Malfoy's shoulders since he led the whole thing. The release of Harry Potter from Azkaban and the subsequent revelation that the Malfoy's had been the ones to frame the boy and the warrant for their arrest was also his fault. Since then, things went downhill. Draco, although let off from his role in framing Potter, had failed to present himself for initiation within the Death Eater ranks when ordered to. It didn't matter that Pansy Parkinson and Theodore Nott had failed to show as well. Their families had been punished harshly for not even knowing where their children were. They had been given a week to find the errant children but had failed in the end. Again they were punished and Voldemort had issued a death warrant for all of the teens upon capture.

The next travesty that had been laid upon Malfoy Sr. was the failure at the Battle of Azkaban. Any chance of returning the captured Death Eaters held in the prison was lost and the forces of the Dark Lord dramatically hindered. Added to this all was his final failure in recruiting James Roper and the chance of controlling the vast resources of the goblin nation. It went without saying that every other miniscule failure was somehow also linked to Malfoy. The mysterious wizard creating havoc amongst his forces, Harry Potter disappearing off the face of the earth, the loss of spies within the ministry and so on. Things were definitely not looking very good for their side right now, let alone for Malfoy Sr.

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At Hogwarts, the atmosphere wasn't much better. An Order meeting had been called and it was obviously about what had taken them all by surprise, the Ministry had locked down and nothing leaked out. How the ministry was able to work out a treaty with the goblins after recent events was unclear. Especially since Dumbledore had made it known that goblins couldn't set foot on the island of Azkaban. How then were the goblins able to coerce the ministry into a treaty? So many things were not adding up and they couldn't get any information from the ministry. Everything was on a strict need to know basis and the Order members that worked for the government found themselves cut off from previous information channels.

Many Order members were starting to doubt the path upon which they were set. The unshakable faith they had placed in their wizened old leader was beginning to falter.

It all seemed to revolve around a certain young boy by the name of Harry Potter. It went without question that they all felt terrible about what had happened to the boy. Well most of them felt that way, but Dumbledore seemed obsessed with him. He stretched the Order's resources to the breaking point trying to find Potter and then further by adding on the search for the Mysterious Wizard and James Roper. Somehow he connected them all together and was adamant that they would be a threat to Harry and the Order as well. It seemed that

Dumbledore had more information on all three individuals than the combined members of the Order, but was unwilling to share any of it and yet was demanding they search for more. Many members were just going through the motions of reporting to Dumbledore as they found their heart just wasn't in it anymore. Even the Weasley's had left the Order due to some disagreement, but no one would explain any further. The youngest Weasley boy remained and was a staunch advocate for Dumbledore.

Most of the things Dumbledore and the Order had been striving to achieve for several decades without success were being accomplished within the span of a few weeks. It was disturbing to say the least that they were being accomplished without Dumbledore's influence. What had Roper and the goblins done differently to make such leaps? Was the Mysterious Wizard behind these revolutionary changes? Did they, the members of the Order of the Phoenix really know the whole picture or just what Dumbledore was willing to tell them? Were they just following along blindly? Many more questions than answers were forthcoming but went unanswered. Dumbledore's current anger with all the new developments caused even more concern.

By the end of the meeting, all were sent off to continue their missions without anymore direction or information, find Harry Potter and bring him back to the safety of Hogwarts; find information on James Roper and the Mysterious wizard. It was all quite baffling.

At the Shrieking Shack, Harry's team continued on unabated by the happenings in the rest of the world. There were still a lot of Death Eaters and allies of the Dark Lord out there causing trouble to keep them busy. The Dark Lord however was unintentionally aiding their side by decreasing the ranks of his Death Eater's through his anger. Without tip top lieutenants and recruits, the forces of dark were in disarray and their attacks scattered and ineffective.

Remus had learned that Fenrir Greyback was out of the country trying to recruit for Voldie, but not having much success. He was not happy about not being able to take him in. He and Tonks had spent many hours trying to track the psychotic werewolf. Not only had he ruined Remus' childhood by turning him, but many others as well.

Greybeard's unquenchable rage and mutilations were the main reason behind the Ministry's harsh stance against the werewolf community. Most werewolves were decent people that wanted to live their lives the best they could. Even with the ministry edicts against them, the majority didn't want to fight for either side. They remained secluded, setting up their own communities where they helped each other as best they could.

With Harry's help the communities that Remus was aware of were receiving the supplies they needed to brew the wolfsbane potion at no charge. The only stipulation was that they keep Harry's name out of the donations so the communities didn't feel obligated in any way. Remus and Tonks would visit and deliver the supplies and help brew the potions. They also set up safe houses for the nights of the full moon. Harry and Ginny also helped, though they were disguised, in setting up protection and alarm wards around the villages. Of course any information anyone might pass on was always welcome. Many came forward thanking them profusely while others were still wary.

Beyond their work with the werewolf communities laid the issue of Severus Snape. With the man missing, they knew something bad was coming. Harry had used all his knowledge of tracking a person but had come up empty. No one seemed to know where the man had gone, including Dumbledore and surprisingly Voldemort. They had searched the most obvious places they could get to, even the Snape and Prince ancestral homes. Nothing was found at either place, although it was hard to keep from destroying the homes in revenge. The only place they had left to look was Snapes quarters at Hogwarts. The biggest topic of discussion had been and continued to be how to get in.

"There's got to be something we're missing. A piece we're not seeing that could link this all together." Harry said gesturing to the scrolls, books and notes scattered across the table they were all sitting at.

"We have Hogwarts to search." Ginny reminded them. "Maybe we'll find something there."

"I'm not sure I agree Ginny. I've known Snape for many years, if there's one thing he's good at, it's covering his tracks. With

Dumbledore convinced he's loyal to him, I'm not sure there will be anything to find."

"You can't be serious Remus!" Tonks exclaimed.

"Don't get me wrong, I have no doubts he's still the slimy little bat he's always been. I'm just not so sure we'll find anything until he resurfaces."

"But that will be too late!"

"Calm down everyone. We haven't even checked his quarters yet. Let's not jump to conclusions. We'd be better off figuring out how to get into Hogwarts without anyone knowing."

Everyone was silent for a few moments thinking.

"Well the first thing we have to do is get by the wards. Now normally the wards will recognize students and inform the Headmaster. There's also an alarm sent to the headmaster when anyone tries to tamper with the wards. Since you and Ginny are still students until you finish your NEWTS, that could pose a problem. "Remus explained for the hundredth time.

"We'll be done before the Holiday break. We could go in after." Ginny reasoned.

"True, but then there's the fact that any visitors are also announced to Dumbledore. The wards don't recognize the specific adult, but it will give away our presence."

"Not if there are a lot of visitors already expected. I'm sure he doesn't keep track of the Order members arriving if there's a large gathering."

"What are you getting at Harry?" Remus questioned puzzled at where this was going.

"Well, holiday break is coming up and the students will be gone with the Yule Ball being cancelled. That only leaves the headmaster and whatever professors are staying at the castle. However," he said in

response to the confused looks on everyone's faces. "Since Hogwarts is the new Headquarters for the Order, a meeting of all the members would mask our entry. Ginny and I will no longer be students and we can slip in with everyone else."

"That's all very well thought out, but how do we know there will be a meeting during the break? I mean everyone's looking forward to being with their families and unless old Voldie attacks, there's really no reason for Dumbledore to call one." Tonks said still trying to figure out where this was leading.

"Tonks could notify us when a meeting is called, but that's still a big risk considering he might not call one." Ginny added.

"What if I said I could guarantee a meeting?" Harry asked them all with a mischievous smile.

"Harry, I don't think it wise to plan an attack just yet the Order...."

"Not an attack Remus. You all are forgetting the one thing Dumbledore is obsessed with.....finding me! All I really have to do is show up, say in Diagon alley for a little Christmas shopping. Everyone's still out looking for me and if they spot me the first thing they'll do is contact Dumbledore. He'll think I'm running around without a care and call a meeting to bring me in again."

"That's brilliant Harry, but also a bit risky don't you think? Dumbledore did give them all orders to take you any way they can."

"I agree with Ginny. What if you're outnumbered or get hit by surprise."

"Tonks I'm not worried about it. They won't have enough force to bring me in. Half of the Order are just barely following through with Dumbledore's orders anyway. I think they're the one's who will be surprised." He knew from the concerned looks on their faces he'd have to explain more. "Look, I'm not getting overconfident; I plan on only sticking around long enough to be spotted. Maybe engaging just enough for them to think they surprised me and then getting out of there."



"I think we should be there with you Harry. There are too many things that could go wrong with this plan. The Death Eater's are still out there looking for you as well as the Order. If they got a signal out....."

"Moony, are you forgetting something? There will be no signals sent out. They don't know the same things I do or you three for that matter. Besides I don't want anyone connecting you all with me. There are enough people who know already."

"Now you're forgetting Harry." Ginny teased with a wicked smile. "We won't be there as ourselves and I'll be able to use magic without worrying about any restrictions."

"I have to agree with these two." Tonks piped in. "Better safe than sorry. Plus we'll be watching your back, we won't get involved unless absolutely necessary."

Harry fought with himself but eventually reason won out. It was true that it would be better to have some backup in an area as crowded as Diagon Alley if anything did happen. He also knew their skills outmatched anyone they could possibly come up against. He really needed to get over this lone avenger crap. What was the use in training his friends if he didn't let them help? He never would've accomplished as much as he had without them, much less survive this long. "Ok, we'll do it your way, but first we have to finish our NEWTs."

"I'm not actually worried about them. At least not like I was with the OWLs. I know I'll do well it's the aftermath that's got me worried."

Everyone nodded in agreement to that statement wondering what Dumbledore might pull when he found out.

The students at Hogwarts weren't coping any better than the adults. Even though Death Eater attacks had decreased, they all felt as if it was the calm before the storm. With the Yule Ball cancelled, most students would be going home to their families. Some weren't so sure they'd be returning to Hogwarts when the break was over. There

were a few students that would be remaining at the school though. Ron Weasley was one of them. He refused to have anything to do with his family since they left the Order. He held them just as responsible as Harry for everything that was happening. They all had stifled his chances of being something great and would never forgive them for it. Even his relationship with Hermione was suffering because of them.

Hermione on the other hand was growing more irritated with Ron's constant disparaging remarks about everyone except Dumbledore. Her worries were mounting as well. Ron couldn't be as thick as he was acting. Sure, she knew he wasn't the most caring of men, but he used to have an endearing quirkiness in him that was now replaced by near lunacy. Anyone who didn't conform to his way of thinking was immediately a potential Death Eater. Something had to be influencing his behavior, but she couldn't find anything that would fit. She didn't trust Dumbledore enough to talk to him about her suspicions and that in itself was a turning point in her life she had yet to come to terms with. Any of the professors would just turn to Dumbledore so they were out of the question. St. Mungo's and the Ministry were out, who knew what bee's nest she'd disturb by going to them. The Weasley's, well they weren't on speaking terms and her own family she had kept purposefully blind of the events happening in the wizarding world. She was effectively stranded.

Her thoughts often turned to Harry. Before Azkaban, he would readily help no matter what the consequences. Now however, he was lost to her. Even if he was willing to help, his knowledge just wasn't up to par. It didn't matter that he had shown an astounding grasp of wizarding spells, potions and well everything when he returned to school. She still didn't understand where that was all coming from and therefore chalked it up to a fluke. Harry was still the mediocre student from before. There was no way he'd understand the puzzle she was trying to piece together. Harry never cracked a book unless prodded to do so. His childish behavior was another source of frustration, but she had other things to concentrate on. She had exhausted the library at Hogwarts researching Ron's dilemma, she never even considered the fact that Hogwarts wasn't all encompassing in it's collection of books and knowledge. If she couldn't find it in Hogwarts, there was nowhere for it to be found.

Forcing thoughts of her ex-friend out of her mind, she tried to focus on her current problem. Her parents had always been there for her and were very supportive, but would they still support her decisions if they found out all she had kept from them? Would they remove her from Hogwarts and pack her off somewhere else? No there was really nothing they could do and in the long run it would be better if they never found out.

Upon thinking all this she realized she really had no one to turn to, causing her to question once again everything she had once believed in. Not only had the adults in her life failed to live up to her expectations, but her friends and her books as well. Books! She could no longer trust them to solve all the answers in life and that above all else painted a grim picture for her future.

Although it was only Friday, it was the day of Harry and Ginny's first NEWT exams. Remus and Tonks had picked up the portkey from Madam Bones without any hassle. After their talk with the minister they would be taking their first exam, Astronomy.

The portkey worked as promised, Harry and Ginny landed in the office of the minister prepared to be grilled about where they were and what they were doing. Madame Bones did ask those questions, but she didn't press them for any more than they were willing to reveal. Compared to all the other interrogation sessions they'd experienced, this one was rather easy and not at all what they were expecting. She certainly didn't treat them as errant children.

"Although this is rather unusual, you are both well within your rights to test early for your NEWTs. Since you Mr. Potter are considered an adult, you don't need anyone's permission. You Miss Weasley have the consent of your parents. All the fines have been paid and the schedules set. All your paperwork is in order, but I can't help but wonder if there isn't more to this than you have told me. Albeit really isn't my concern beyond what you have told me, please remember my door is always open to you should you need it. I sincerely wish you all the best on your exams. Now on to your schedule and your reusable portkey. These quills will take you to and from your examination area. Only myself, Madame Marchbanks and Professor

Tofty know its location. Both the professors and myself have taken an unbreakable vow not to reveal it or that you are taking the exams until they are scored and become a part of public record.” She looked at the two teens sitting before her and waited for their acknowledgement before pressing on. “Now tonight you will be sitting your exam and practical for Astronomy. Tomorrow you will have Defense against the Dark Arts in the morning and Transfiguration in the afternoon. Sunday will be Charms and Herbology. Monday, Care of Magical Creatures and Potions; Tuesday, law and Ancient Runes; Wednesday, Arithmancy and Healing; Thursday, Warding and History of Magic and finally Friday will be Muggle Studies. After your last exam/practical is completed, your portkey will only work one more time to transport you out of the Ministry. It will disappear after that. Your exams should be scored and the results sent to you by the Monday following. As soon as you have read the results, they will become a matter of record and we will be released from our oaths. Now, do you have any questions before you begin?”

Neither Harry nor Ginny could think of anything so just shook their heads and stood from their chairs. “Thank you Madame Bones for your assistance. We know you have many more questions you would like answered, but have respectfully refrained from asking them. We thank you for that as well. When we finish our NEWTs we will explain more.”

“There is no need Mr. Potter.”

“Actually there is ma’am but there is too much to go into just now.” Ginny responded.

“In that case Mr. Potter, Miss Weasley, my door is open to you. When you are ready please let me know. Now I believe it is just about time for your Astronomy exam. The portkeys are set to activate automatically 10 minutes prior to the start time. Good luck to you both.”

No sooner had she finished talking, the portkeys activated and brought Ginny and Harry to a room within the Ministry neither had ever seen before. It was circular in design with a large domed ceiling. There were only 3 desks situated in the center with two very old

individuals sitting at the largest one. Upon their arrival the two stood and introduced themselves and got right down to business. The written exam was first and they were given 1 hour to complete it. After that, they had a 15 minute break before the practicals began.

It was amazing to both teens to see the room transform. The lights went out and deep blackness engulfed them until flickers of light grew into three dimensional models of stars and planets. It felt as though they were walking in actual space. They were asked to point out specific stars, constellations and planets and explain their meanings and how they were used. It was amazing to say the least and much more relaxing than their OWLs had been. Both Ginny and Harry finished in record time to the surprise of Madame Marchbanks and Professor Tofty. As soon as Harry and Ginny left, the two instructors sat down and started grading the written and practical exams.

The rest of the exams passed in much the same way with a written and practical exam for every subject. In some ways it was more difficult than Hogwarts but with each exam the teens grew more impressed with the facilities and design of each test. For the Defense against the Dark Arts practical, there was an obstacle course filled with traps, creatures that attacked and riddles to overcome. In Healing, they performed spells and administered potions on a Golem. Arithmancy and Runes they had to explain complex equations, how to create spells, and how to use runes in warding. Then in the warding practical, they took all the principals and had to actually create a ward of protection. Ginny had to identify Harry's ward and then demonstrate how to take it down while explaining the process and then Harry had to do the same for Ginny's ward.

History of Magic was a shocker as they didn't expect a practical. The entire wall turned itself into the equivalent of a muggle movie theatre. Across the entire space was shown several different battles in all their gory glory. Both were asked to identify the specific battle from history and analyze the tactics and strategies used and the impacts on the magical world. Being that the main characters were Goblins and wizards it was quite difficult to place each one considering there were so many to choose from.

The law practical was just as surprising as they both participated in a mock trial having to defend their client. It was an experience neither one would forget. Harry won his case just barely while Ginny trumped the prosecution spectacularly. Being the youngest female Weasley had its advantages. She was always trying to defend herself against her older brothers and most of the time it required creative thinking which she definitely learned and took to new heights. She could turn anything around. Harry had no doubt that if she wanted, she could probably convince the Wizangamot that Voldemort was an angel. It wouldn't be exaggerating to say that both their professors' would agree with that statement wholeheartedly.

The muggle studies practical turned out to be the most fun, as well as the most dangerous. They spent the last day, after finishing their written exam, in the muggle world shopping, having lunch and going to a movie. All the while both professors took notes on how well the students interacted and blended with the non-magical people. The danger resided in the possibility of their students being spotted by another wizard. Considering they weren't too far from the Leaky Cauldron, there was a high probability of other wizards being around. Both teens awareness was on high alert, but didn't let it effect their exam. Nothing happened and Harry and Ginny were able to breath a sigh of relief once the exam was completed. Madame Marchbanks and Professor Tofty lauded their exemplary performance in blending in with the muggles as well as on the rest of their exams. Before they departed for the last time, Harry and Ginny thanked both professors for their assistance who in return thanked the teens for the enjoyable time. Never had they sat exams with such fine students and wished them luck in the future.

The only thing left was to wait for the exam results to arrive which would be in two days. Everyone agreed there was no use worrying about the results so pressed ahead in firming up their plans for Harry's appearance in Diagon Alley.

So caught up in their planning, no one noticed the owl that had tripped their wards until it was blaring so loudly none could think. Harry immediately stepped out of their hidden space to accept the delivery. After thoroughly checking both the owl and its parcels, he relieved the owl of its burden and gave it a few treats before stepping

back into the hidden shack. Waiting expectantly were his friends. There was only one thing this could be, their NEWT results. Harry briefly considered trying to stall, but reconsidered seeing as how there was nothing else allowed in the area. It definitely took the fun out of it. Without a word, Harry handed a letter to Ginny who eagerly tore it open.

“Hey that could’ve been cursed!” Harry reprimanded.

Ginny snorted and said without looking away from her results, “Not likely, the wards wouldn’t allow it and neither would you. I knew the second you returned they were okay.”

“Yeah well you still should’ve checked.”

“Whatever Harry, just open your letter.” She shot back.

“How’d you do Ginny?” Remus asked.

“Not until Harry opens his.”

“Well Harry? Don’t keep us waiting.” Demanded Tonks.

Harry just smirked and slowly and primly started opening his letter, treating it as if it were some precious object he didn’t want to damage. It was taking forever, but that was okay with him. That was the whole point of this little exercise. That is until he felt a sharp stinging on his hand. Startled, he almost dropped it and looked up to find the culprit, when he saw 3 wands trained on him. The looks on the faces of those holding the wands were deadly serious.

Sighing heavily, he tore open his letter. “You guys are no fun!”

“Sure we are Harry, just not when you want us to be. No one’s perfect.” Quipped Tonks.

“So?” Remus asked once again.

Harry handed his letter over to his older friend and Tonks and Ginny read over his shoulder.

Harry received the following results:

Astronomy:

Practical: E

Written: O

DADA:

Practical: O

Written: O

Transfiguration:

Practical: O

Written: O

Charms:

Practical: O

Written: O

Herbology:

Practical: E

Written: E

Care of Magical Creatures:

Practical: O

Written: O

Potions:



Practical: O

Written: O

Law:

Practical: E

Written: O

Ancient Runes:

Practical: O

Written: O

Arithmancy:

Practical: O

Written: O

Healing:

Practical: O

Written: O

Warding:

Practical: O

Written: O

History of Magic:

Practical: E

Written: E

Muggle Studies:

Practical: O

Written: O

Ginny's weren't much different. She received the following:

Astronomy:

Practical: O

Written: O

DADA:

Practical: O

Written: O

Transfiguration:

Practical: O

Written: O

Charms:

Practical: O

Written: O

Herbology:

Practical: E

Written: E

Care of Magical Creatures:

Practical: O

Written: O

Potions:

Practical: O

Written: E

Law:

Practical: O

Written: E

Ancient Runes:

Practical: E

Written: O

Arithmancy:

Practical: O

Written: E

Healing:

Practical: O

Written: O

Warding:

Practical: E

Written: O

History of Magic:

Practical: E

Written: E

Muggle Studies:

Practical: O

Written: O

The main thing was they had both passed with flying colors!

“Congratulations both of you! These are outstanding results, no pun intended.” Remus said with a broad smile.

“Wow! These are great, you’ll have no problem with whatever you want when this is all over!” Tonks added enthusiastically.

Both teens blushed at the praises, but Harry shook it off quicker and immediately turned serious.

“Okay, before we celebrate we have a few more things to do before this becomes common knowledge.”

“Right, I’ll take Ginny to the Ministry for her apparition license and all the other paperwork for her adult status.”

Harry and Remus nodded. “Be careful and we’ll meet you back here before the next phase.” Remus said right before the two ladies popped away.

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The four Hogwarts exiles celebrated well into the night and by the next morning were in no mood or shape to do anything but sleep in

and relax the entire day. Phase II would be a day late, but nothing had happened so they didn't see the harm in making sure they were up to par before starting something dangerous.

The next day, they were up early checking their gear and preparing for the days events. Once satisfied everyone was ready, they apparated to Diagon Alley and immediately set up positions, communicating the same way they did in the Battle of Azkaban. A search of the alley and surrounding areas only turned up a few early shoppers, but rather than relax, they continued their watch further into the morning. Around 10 O'clock, two new wizards entered the alley and Harry, who was stationed by the apparition point, immediately spotted the disguises they were wearing. Without alerting them he scanned them quickly to confirm his suspicions. Kingsley Shacklebolt and Daedalus Diggle were on patrol in the alley. Neither wizard looked too happy to be on patrol, but it really didn't matter, they'd be useful enough for Harry's purpose.

Not wanting to seem too obvious, Harry waited until the two Order members had moved on. Ginny, Remus and Tonks kept them under constant surveillance from their current positions and reporting back to Harry. Maneuvering himself while still invisible, Harry made his way towards one of the Jewelry shops in the alley. When he felt it safe and no-one was watching, he removed the spells and became visible once again. Pulling out a blank sheet of parchment, he pretended to examine it while looking up every so often as if to check his location and where he'd need to go. To others it seemed as though he was deciding on where to shop for items that were listed on his piece of parchment. A few minutes passed when Harry received word from Tonks that Kingsley had spotted him and was moving to intercept him. Without missing a beat, Harry placed the parchment in his robe pocket and moved into the Jewelry store. Inside he waited until he could sense Kingsley and Diggle approaching. Outwardly he appeared calm and unconcerned, while inside he tensed his body for an attack. He could feel the two wizard's auras right outside the shop and briefly wondered if they would confront him or not. Concentrating on his acting, he engaged the store clerk in conversation about a necklace he saw that Ginny might like. Several minutes passed and still Kingsley and Daedalus didn't enter the shop. They still remained outside. Purchasing the necklace, Harry placed it in his robes and

cautiously left the shop. As soon as the door closed behind him, two stunners were shot at him, but he easily avoided them and returned fire in kind. Not expecting Harry to fight back, the two were stunned instantly, which spoke volumes for the preparedness and general awareness that the Order members maintained, let alone a veteran Auror. Expecting another attack, Harry scanned the area and directed the others to do the same. Apparently neither Kingsley nor Diggle had made any attempt to notify the Order of Harry's presence. With no other Order members present, Harry carefully made his way to the apparition point and returned to the Shack. Ginny soon followed while Remus and Tonks remained in Diagon Alley to see what happened next.

"Well Gin, I guess that went without a hitch. It's a little disturbing how unprepared the Order seems to be, but I guess I should've expected it."

"They're gambling with their lives and don't even see it!" Ginny spoke hotly. "What if you were a Death Eater or someone else was there to return fire? They didn't even expect you to fight back. They are dangerously underestimating their opponents, and I don't just mean you Harry. They're going to all wind up dead if they don't wake up to what's going on around them. I'm glad my family has finally realized this."

"Hopefully they'll realize sooner than later Gin, but we can't focus on that now. They'll do what they want and we'll do what we can to keep them all alive. All we can do now is wait and hope all goes according to plan."

"I hate waiting!" Ginny pouted.

Harry chuckled at her and enveloped her in his arms. "I think I can take your mind off things for a while."

"You do, huh?" Ginny smirked returning the hug.

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Back in the alley, Tonks and Remus carefully approached the two stunned Order members and re-enervated them and quickly turned invisible. Kingsley was the first to get his bearings and turned to help Daedalus up from the ground.

“What Happened Kingsley?”

“Potter attacked us! I don’t believe it! We need to inform Dumbledore. I don’t think Potter expected us, but his level of skill and response time has definitely increased. He may be back, but I think Dumbledore needs to know so we can set up a better plan.”

“Why would the kid be out Christmas shopping? It doesn’t make any sense. He’s been so careful not to be seen since he left Hogwarts. Why now?”

“I’m not sure,” Kingsley replied scratching his chin. “Maybe he thought we’d given up or let our guard down.”

Daedalus just shrugged and follow his companion out of the alley and to Hogwarts.

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Ginny and Harry were preoccupied when Tonks and Remus returned. Since there wasn’t anything the others needed to know immediately, they preoccupied themselves in a similar manner. Only a couple hours later did Tonks receive an indication from her Order Medallion that a meeting was being called at Hogwarts that night. Tonks immediately notified the others. So far, everything had gone as planned, now if only the next part would be as easy.

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Half an hour before the meeting, the four made their way outside Hogwarts gates and waited invisible for others to start arriving. When there were quite a few, Tonks made herself visible appearing as if she had just apparated in and mingled with the other order members

waiting for the gates to open. As soon as they did, the gaggle of members surged onto the grounds quickly not realizing that there were three unexpected tag-alongs. Entering the Great Hall, Tonks continued on with the Order while Harry, Ginny and Remus headed towards the dungeons. They remained invisible, carefully checking for wards as they made their way down to Snape's personal quarters. Thankfully they ran in to no problems until they came upon Snape's entrance. Very cautiously Harry scanned the area and found several wards placed by Snape and Dumbledore. One was to alert Dumbledore of Snape's presence and another to alert him to anyone attempting entry. Snape had cast similar wards plus a few nasty hexes for anyone that tried to gain entrance or bring down the wards. After a few moments consideration, Harry decided on a course of action. Drawing runes into the air, he wove a delicate pattern that merged with the existing wards and slowly spread them apart creating a hole through which they could enter. Remus and Ginny watched in amazement but knew better than to say anything.

Harry was consumed in his task and several minutes passed by before his spell work was completed. Before entering, he focused his senses towards the inner part of Snape's quarters and found several more protection wards, alarms and traps. These were not as tricky to bypass and soon Harry had those down and their way in unhindered. With a tentative step forward he entered Snape's sanctum then motioned for the others to follow.

Inside, the room was exactly how they expected it to look. There was nothing out of place; the room was immaculate and decorated in blacks and greens. It was set up as a study with bookshelves lining one wall and glass cases with potion ingredients lining the opposite wall. At the back wall was an enormous fireplace with a desk in front of it, made of rich mahogany and intricately carved reliefs. The woodwork was handsomely done and obviously very expensive. Behind the desk was a rich black leather chair, which looked comfortable even if it was a bit severe in looks. It was obvious Snape liked his comforts. In front of the desk was a matching leather couch.

Although it was in the dungeons, it didn't feel dank and cold. It was warm and comfortable even though there was no fire. Harry scanned the area once more and found to his disbelief a transfigured object



sitting inconspicuously on one of the shelves. What was strange is that this figure had a life force that was masked by many spells. Curious, Harry moved toward it and focused his scan on the object. What he found enraged him. Trying to control himself, Harry lifted the unprotected item off the shelf and called to Remus and Ginny who were searching other areas of the room.

“Remus, Ginny, come here and look at this.” He stated through gritted teeth.

After approaching and taking the item from Harry’s grasp, Ginny responded; “It looks like a simple paperweight Harry, I don’t...”

“No Ginny, I see what Harry’s getting at. This is a transfigured item. If what I’m seeing is true it’s been transfigured from a live being.”

“What! Why would Snape do something like that? It’s barbaric!” she exclaimed.

“I can think of something.” Harry answered dangerously.

“You don’t think....he wouldn’t be that cruel.”

“What are you two on about?”

“Think Ginny.” Harry almost snapped.

“I don’t think Snape is that accomplished in transfiguration.” Remus commented reluctantly.

“No he isn’t, but he wouldn’t mind having a trophy. Something close to me that he could gloat over. Something that someone else took care of.”

“Oh my Merlin! You don’t think.....that’s not Hedwig!?” Ginny harshly whispered.

“That’s exactly what I think. I agree with Remus, Snapes not very good at transfiguration, but there is someone who is. That person has a lot to answer for.”

“Oh Harry, you don’t think Dumbledore would stoop so low do you?” Ginny asked sadly, already knowing the answer but hoping she was wrong.

“Wouldn’t he?” Harry growled.

“Cub, no matter who did this, we need to concentrate on why we’re here. Why don’t you remove the spells and set Hedwig free. She can meet us back at the shack.”

“I don’t think we can do that Moony, we don’t know what state she’s in or was in when they put these damnable spells on her. Who knows how long she’s been like this. No it’s not safe; we’ll take her with us and then make sure she’s okay. Even though I want to leave now, we did come for a different purpose and we have to make sure there isn’t anything here to help us figure out Snapes plans.”

With that said the three returned to searching Snapes quarters but found nothing else of import. Slipping out of the castle was almost too easy. They found out later from Tonks that all the Order had been dispatched after only 30 minutes to renew their search for Harry with vigor. She also learned that Ron Weasley had become unbearable to be around. So much so that none of the Order members would speak to him, except Dumbledore and Granger.

Not really concerned with Ron’s plight, Harry did find it a bit off. Whatever the youngest male Weasley’s problem was, it would have to be dealt with later. The concern now rested with Hedwig and removing the spells on her. They weren’t impossible to remove, Harry just wasn’t sure what state he would find her in and if he really wanted to face that. Even though he could still feel her life force, it was weak and that scared him.

After gathering the necessary healing potions and bandages, Harry started reversing the spells. He was being very meticulous as he didn’t want to make anything worse than it already was. So consumed, he didn’t realize how long it was taking him. Finally with one last spell, Hedwig morphed back into her proper form but lay still, her eyes closed. Casting several diagnostic spells, Harry found she

was severely dehydrated, malnourished and had a broken wing. Immediately his anger rose with the state of his familiar. He swore Dumbledore would pay for this. Mentally he catalogued all the terrible ways in which he could prolong the headmaster's suffering. Of all the things the old goat had done, this had pushed him over the edge. Too angry to move, it was Tonks who started the necessary healing to bring Hedwig back. She poured a potion down her throat while Ginny gently held her. Then she carefully pulled Hedwig's wing out and cast a bone mending spell on it and wrapped it in bandages to allow for proper healing. They all knew from the results of the diagnostic spells that it would be a while before Hedwig was up and about.

Noticing that Harry was still immobile, Ginny went over to him and embraced him in a warm hug. "She'll be alright Harry. It will be a while, but she'll be okay. I'm glad we found her." She left off, not wanting to state out loud what they both knew. If they hadn't found her, Hedwig would most likely be dead.

Shaken out of his thoughts, Harry wrapped his arms around Ginny and nodded, still too emotional to speak. He stared at his familiar with a heavy heart before calling Dobby and Winky. When they arrived he asked them to take care of Hedwig, which they both enthusiastically agreed to. As they took her out of the room, Harry swore he could hear them mumbling about getting revenge for hurting their masters' familiar.

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Hedwig was still unconscious the next morning, but Dobby and Winky assured them all she would be fine. Glad for the house elves' caring nature, Harry knew Hedwig was in good hands and would be fine. Now he needed to concentrate on other matters.

The first being their invitation to the Weasleys for Christmas. No matter how he felt about going, something was tickling the back of his mind seeming to warn him away. He couldn't shake it off and it continued to grow with every day closer it came to the holiday.

The others felt the same, but didn't want it to interfere with their Holidays. In order to make things better, or attempt to be, several unannounced trips were made to the Burrow when no one was home to place extra wards and protections. Only Ginny responded that she would visit but didn't tell her family when that exactly would be.

On Christmas Eve, right before the start of the traditional Weasley dinner, the four apparated outside the wards of the Burrow and trekked the short distance to the back door. They knew the wards were working when Molly threw open the door and engulfed Ginny in one of her bear hugs and repeated the gesture with the rest of them. She was so overjoyed to see them all; she had tears streaming down her face. Hurriedly she shuffled them all inside and they were greeted enthusiastically by the rest of the family. Before any questions could be asked, Molly had them all seated and dinner spread before them. After everyone had tucked in Arthur broke the silence and started a conversation that would last well into the night. "so I take it you've finished your exams?"

Ginny looked up at her father and smiled, then handed him the letter with her results. Molly leaned over and read them with her husband. Ginny had to stifle a giggle as their eyes nearly popped out of their heads. Seeing as their parents were both too stunned to move, Bill and Charlie reached for the parchment at the same time. Bill won out forcing Charlie to get up and run around the table to read over his older brother's shoulder. He whistled appreciatively at her results causing the twins to look at each other curiously before they two left their seats to look at what had everyone so shocked.

"WOW!"

"Ginny.."

"It seems as though.."

"You've set the record for.."

"the Weasley family."

"If not all of Hogwarts.." Fred ended.

“Not really, Harry did just as well if not better.” Ginny replied, savoring everyone’s shocked faces.

“Is what Ginny said true Harry dear?” Mrs. Weasley finally spoke up to ask.

Harry was silent for just a moment before answering. “I did better on some things, but Ginny more than made up for it on others.”

“How is this possible? I didn’t even know you were taking some of these classes Ginny.” Mr. Weasley spoke the surprise evident in his voice.

Ginny looked to Harry for support. He nodded slightly and then Ginny turned to her parents. “It’s one of those things I can’t really explain except that Harry, Remus and Tonks have been tutoring me.”

The Weasley’s didn’t much like this explanation but knew better than to press. “Well I believe congratulations are in order for the both of you.” Everyone around the table was shaken out of their thoughts and agreed with the Weasley patriarch. “I can’t say as I understand what’s going on, but could you enlighten us as to what you plan to do now?”

Harry sighed, he knew this would be foremost on their minds. He really didn’t feel comfortable telling them any of their plans, but also felt he owed it to them. The entire family minus Ron had been bending over backwards to make up for all the wrongs they had done him even to the extent of paying him back the money that had been taken from his vault. This had been mostly from the profits Fred and George had made from their shop. The way in which they had set it up with Gringotts prevented Harry from refusing it. He didn’t know what kind of deal the Twins had made with the rest of the family, but Harry didn’t feel that was his business so let it slide.

“None of you will like what I’m going to say, but please hear me out. Since Ginny and I have finished our NEWTs and are considered adults now, we no longer need to go to Hogwarts. We’ve already sent our letters of withdrawal to Dumbledore.” He waited patiently for the uproar caused by this to die down.

“Everybody SHUT-UP!” Ginny yelled, silencing everyone almost instantaneously. “Look I know you’re all concerned, and I don’t blame you. There’s a war going on, but I can’t deal with you all deciding when it’s okay for me to be an adult and when it’s not. It’s an all or nothing deal. Harry, Remus and Tonks have trained me beyond your wildest dreams and I can definitely hold my own. I’m not about to go rushing in to things without a good deal of planning and forethought. We may be doing things differently than how you believe they should be done, but that doesn’t make you right and us wrong. What you’re doing right now is really no different from what Dumbledore and the Order is doing. I thought that’s why you left! We can’t afford wasting anymore time. Now.....We came here to spend time with family and friends and to have a nice traditional Christmas, as much as we can during these times. We also wanted to explain what we could about our plans. If you don’t want any of this than we’ll just leave.” She finished ranting to her stunned family. No one knew how to respond so the conversation continued to lag. Some time passed before Remus decided to speak up and end the stifled atmosphere.

“I know this is all very difficult for everyone involved, but we need to focus on the future. We all have a part to play and certain things that need to be done. We need to pull together to work this out or all will be lost.”

“It’s just.....They’re all so young Remus! I....”

“And how old were you Molly or you Arthur when this all first started? I know it’s hard, but be proud of how your children turned out. They are just as willing as your were to fight for the good of all.” Remus interrupted Mrs. Weasley.

“Molly?.....” Arthur questioned concerned at his wife’s pale and stoic face, reached out to hold her hands and looked her straight in the eyes. “They’re right. My heart may not agree, but in my mind, I know they are right. We’ve already lost two sons to this war, I don’t want to loose anymore because we were unwilling to at least listen.”

“Arthur, we haven’t lost anyone and I refuse to let any of my children participate in some foolish crusade.”

“That’s where you are wrong Molly.” Harry spoke up. “You know I am the only one that can defeat Voldemort. It took me a while to accept it, but I can’t do it on my own. I need help from those that I trust. Right now those numbers are pretty few. No matter what you think we are not running into battle without thinking through things logically. If we don’t do something now, how many others will die? How many other mothers and fathers will live the reality of your nightmares. How many children will be forced to live as I have without someone to care for them. We are more than capable of ending this, more so than the average witch or wizard or any of the Order members that flaunt their superiority but fail to actually do anything but search for a child whom they believe is the ultimate weapon to miraculously save all of wizarding society. In a way they are correct, but what they are doing is self destructive. I’m tired of having to explain myself over and over and will not do so anymore. We need your help, but if you’d rather, we will leave now.”

“Harry I.....” Molly started and then stopped, tears rolling down her eyes. She understood she was being selfish but it was hard not to be. “I need to think on this, for now though, I don’t want any of you to leave. Let’s just enjoy Christmas and we can talk more afterwards.”

“Well I for one can agree to that!” Tonks piped in, trying to relax the solemn atmosphere slightly.

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Christmas morning dawned with a fresh covering of snow, promising a beautiful picture book setting for a perfect Christmas celebration. Molly Weasley had stayed up with her husband late into the early hours discussing their different views of the current war. It almost gave them a heart attack when their fireplace flared green and the face of an angry and unsettled goblin appeared.

“Sorry to intrude, but we need to get in touch with Mr. Potter. It is a matter of utmost urgency.”

Mrs. Weasley was about to react when Arthur stood and calmed her by placing a hand on her shoulder while at the same time addressing the goblin. "If you could wait for a moment master goblin, I will go wake him."

The goblin nodded. As Arthur turned to go they all heard a voice reply. "No need Mr. Weasley, I'm already awake. What is it Stormtooth." At the goblins obvious hesitation due to the Weasley's presence, Harry spoke up once more. "You can relay your message Stormtooth, the Weasley's can be trusted."

"As you say Mr. Potter. Lord Rack'N'Stack urgently requests your assistance in a matter of security here at Gringotts. We have detected an intruder that has managed to cause chaos amongst our security dragons. We are having difficulty locating the interloper and containing the dragons at the same time."

"We'll be there shortly." Responded Harry, and before the flames returned to normal was upstairs waking the others.

Unfortunately, Harry couldn't keep this crisis between the four of them. Mr. and Mrs. Weasley had followed Harry up stairs and the twins, being light sleepers had heard everyone waking up. Seeing Harry, Remus, Ginny and Tonks preparing to go somewhere in battle gear caused enough ruckus to wake the rest of the house. Arthur was the one who filled everyone else in on the fire call and before Harry could object, the Weasley's were insisting they would be coming along to help. He didn't have time to waste, so he left them with a warning and quickly apparated followed in close succession by the others. While Harry had permissions to apparate directly into Gringotts, the others didn't and had to wait outside the bank while the goblins took down the wards to let them in. This gave Harry enough time to explain to the goblins about the Weasley involvement and what they could or couldn't tell the red-headed clan. Harry in turn received a completely different briefing about the security breach at Gringotts than what was about to be given to the rest of the group.

Harry had a pretty good idea who was behind all this and the goblins had agreed with his theory. They had been suspecting something to happen, but no-one thought he had the audacity to attack Gringotts



itself. The implications were very severe and depending on whose side the attack was in support of, would normally dictate the side Gringotts would side with. Snape could claim to be working for Dumbledore hoping for support to Voldemort or vice versa. Then there was also the fact that he could be working completely as an independent, but that would gain nothing except if he wanted the Goblins to side against wizards in general which would destroy the wizarding economy or maybe he hoped the goblins would stay neutral and provide silent support to both sides. It was very complex and the possibilities and subplots could go on and on. One thing Snape didn't account for was the goblins staunch support of Harry Potter. He had miscalculated drastically and would in the end regret his actions. Harry had had enough of Snape and it was time for the misogynous bastard to be removed from the equation for good.

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Once everyone was in the war room at Gringotts, Stormtooth gave a rundown of the situation. No one seemed to realize that certain things were overlooked during the briefing except Harry's team. However, the look Harry shot them was enough explanation for them and they kept quiet. It seemed as though every time a group of goblins were able to get close to the intruder, one of the security dragons showed up ravaging the area. The goblins were not immune to these attacks and couldn't figure out why. Instead of continuing to track the thief, they would have to concentrate all their efforts into subduing the crazed dragons and by then the thief was gone. This cycle kept repeating itself and they didn't know how to alleviate the situation. They were certain however, that the intruder would not be able to leave the bank. It also seemed peculiar that the thief was sticking to the catacombs of the bank where most of the older more lucrative vaults were located. Harry had his theory on this and directed Stormtooth to investigate the vaults for tampering or any magical presence that was out of place. Stormtooth immediately turned to his second in command Sharptongue directing him to assemble a team of crack ward breakers to investigate this. Harry suggested Bill Weasley assist the goblin team. Bill looked bewildered but nodded to Sharptongue and left with him to start their task.

Next was the issue of the dragon handlers. Charlie Weasley was directed to assist FlameSpear and his team in trying to subdue the dragons where they could. Eagerly Charlie took a portkey from Stormtooth that would relocate him to where the team was located in the bank. Harry briefly contemplated where best to have the senior Weasley's and Fred and George posted. Fred and George would be great use for diversionary tactics, or entrapments, but that would put them too close to danger and he couldn't trust their talent against the wiles of Snape. Looking at Stormtooth he finally made a decision and placed the remaining Weasley's with two different groups of goblin warriors standing guard over the two main entrances to the catacombs. The Weasley's seemed a little surprised at Harry's command over the goblins but they stayed their tongues and went to go do as they were bid. Harry breathed a sigh of relief once they were all out of the room. Now they could get down to the main problem.

"Do you have any idea where the intruder is right now?" Harry asked.

Stormtooth pulled up a miniature map of the bank and scanned it quickly before pointing to a solitary dot and said; "There it is. It's an unknown magical signature located on the 3rd sublevel of the bank."

Harry nodded then started explaining his plan to trap the thief. It only took a couple of minutes but Stormtooth understood exactly what Harry was planning and it was a relief that the other goblins would welcome greatly if he was able to pull it off. Harry apparated his team to the spot Stormtooth indicated on the map. When they arrived on sublevel three there was nothing in sight but that didn't mean there was nothing there. Immediately all four turned invisible and Harry started scanning the area with the others. Sure enough, he picked up the unknown signature and directed the others as to its location. Stealthily they rounded the bend to where the person was and waited for Harry to make the first move.

The individual was under a cloaking spell which besides masking his magical signature, also made the person blend in to his surroundings. It was extremely advanced magic and Harry knew that Snape was capable of performing this spell. It didn't make him completely invisible, but it took a very trained wizard to spot the distortions of the cloaked person when they moved. This individual was taking every

precaution not to make too much movement. It was as if he was waiting for something before he moved, as if he was waiting for the goblins to catch up to him. Right now, however that didn't matter to Harry. Snape was wreaking havoc in an area belonging to the Goblin Nation he had sworn to protect, and he would pay no matter who he was doing this for.

Harry's scan of the miserable excuse for a wizard also revealed that he was carrying a dragon egg. This obviously was the cause of the Gringott's dragons going berserk. It also shed light on what Snape was attempting to do, which infuriated Harry even more. Using his mind speak, Harry explained to the others.

"I'm not sure who he's working for, but it is definitely Snape. He's got a dragon egg which is why the dragons are going crazy, they're trying to find it but can't quite detect it's exact location due to the cloaking spell Snape's under. The git is purposely leading the goblins into traps by waiting for them and the dragons to catch up to him. He's basically trying to clear out the goblins from this area. I would expect that once he wears down the numbers of goblins there are others waiting to enter to gain control of these vaults. I don't think he actually did his research because his friends are going to run in to quite a surprise if they actually get close enough to them. Which they won't. Remus take this portkey and let Stormtooth know what we found and tell him to increase his defenses around the entrances to the bank and have the ward team focus on searching out any anomalies' in the magic down here in the catacombs. We may have some rats hiding in the shadows waiting for a signal to enter the fight."

"Will do Harry, be careful and I'll be right back."

"Ginny, I want you to place a displacement field around him and Tonks follow that up with a time warp spell so he can't move. I'm going to summon the egg and hopefully get it back to it's rightful place so we can get the dragons under control."

The two woman acknowledged the plan and Harry counted down. Snape didn't know what hit him when the dragons egg he had been holding flew out of his hands. He tried to reach for it but found he couldn't move. All he could think was "Oh Bugger" before his vision

blurred. He couldn't see anything but swirling colors around him and started to panic, but there was nothing he could do.

Harry knew Snape must be panicking by now, and only wished he had time to see the man's face, he was sure it would be one to add to his growing collection. Now, however he had to focus his attention on the dragon egg now in his possession. He had no idea which nest it belonged to and could only hope he could evade the remaining dragons while finding it. What he had momentarily forgotten, was that by holding the egg it now held his scent and magical aura which would not work in his favor.

Before any of them had time to move, a large male dragon had rounded the corner and started to charge. Ginny screamed when she saw Harry disappear under the belly of the beast while Tonks tried casting every spell she knew to restrain or distract it. Nothing seemed to be working. Just then Remus popped back into the area and had to duck to avoid the spells that were rapidly coursing from the girl's wands. Looking over his shoulder he gasped at the sight voicing a few short expletives and then engaging in the fight to get the dragon off Harry.

Unseen to the others, Harry had cast a protection shield around himself and the egg just in time as he rolled under and between the legs of the enormous male. Unfortunately, he didn't miss the tail which struck him hard in the chest throwing him up against the hard granite wall of the catacomb. Rock chips and dust flew out around him momentarily obscuring his vision. Carefully he shook off the impact and placed the egg on the ground. As he backed away he cast several protection charms on the egg to keep it safe from any collateral damage. The male dragon was still searching for him but seemed confused. When Harry was far enough away, he apparated away from the egg closer to the others and watched to see what the dragon would do. A few tense minutes passed as the dragon sniffed the air trying to find the scent of the egg and its kidnapper. In a blink of the eye, the dragon turned abruptly, scooped the egg up into its mammoth jaws and sprung into the air flying off down the darkened tunnels.

As he breathed a sigh of relief, Harry felt the impact of a freight train hit him from behind and was once again flying through the air. He landed hard 20 feet away hearing and feeling his ribs and arm break. He cursed himself for letting down his shield but looking up, he had no time for self recrimination. The female dragon that had snuck up on him was now towering over him about to breath fire. She didn't seem as confused as her male counterpart, in fact she seemed to know exactly where Harry was standing and he felt chills race down his spine.

Three shouts of PROTEGO MAXIMUS rang out and echoed through the tunnel and Harry felt the strong shields snap into place around him just as the dragon released its deadly breath. He could feel the immense heat radiating through the shields and hoped the dragon needed air quite soon. He took advantage of the time given him to cast quick healing spells on his ribs and arms. It wasn't the best but it would do for now. The shields broke just as the dragons flames stopped. Harry apparated once more, but the dragon wasn't fooled. With her great snout in the air she took one sniff and rounded on him, immediately targeting him. With the aid of the others, they tried to stun the beast but to no avail, it only seemed to enrage her further. Harry did not want to harm the magnificent creature, but he also didn't want his friends or himself to die. While fighting off the vicious swipes with her talons and tail and between bouts of fire, he tried to think of a way to subdue her without hurting her. The fight dragged on for what seemed like eternity, and yet none of them could think of a way out of the mess without killing what they assumed to be the mother of the stolen dragon egg. Numerous times his thoughts drifted to letting the dragon have at Snape but that wouldn't do. No, he deserved much more in the way of punishments and he was going to make sure the man got every bit he deserved.

Focusing back on the dragon, he realized that he let his attention slip too long, as a talon caught on his shoulder and dragged him to the ground. He was pinned! He struggled in vain against the enormous weight being pressed down upon him. He could hear his friends screaming and casting spells, but nothing was working. The dragons' tail whipped around and tried to impale him but it thunked against his battle armor. Harry wasn't without injury, though his armor saved him from being impaled, the weight and force with which the tail hit him,

once again cracked his ribs and he was having trouble breathing. Unfortunately for the dragon, this was the last straw. Harry had tried to find a way to end this without destroying the dragon, but that bridge was now burned. He pulled out his sword and with what strength he had left swiped it across the top of the dragon claw. Thank the Gods, it was his magical sword because it actually cut through the thick impervious hide of the dragon. The loud drawn out screech of pain and the retraction of her claw gave Harry enough room to back away and regain his feet. The screeching soon turned to a roar of rage and the dragon returned her focus to the now visible Harry. He had dropped the invisibility spell to save energy. The dragons head lowered and she prepared to charge. Harry stood his ground and told the others to back away. When they didn't listen he shoved his ungloved hand at them and forced them several hundred yards down the tunnel away from him. He had just enough time to jump out of the way of the massive jaws closing in on him. Then with all his might and channeling magic into his arms and sword, he jumped under the dragon and stabbed upwards, catching the soft underbelly. He was dragged with the dragon until she collapsed right before Remus, Tonks and Ginny. The female was still conscious and still very dangerous, so they kept their distance. Harry once again trapped under the dragon was struggling to get free. His shield was keeping most of the weight from crushing him, but it was draining his energy quickly to keep it up. The dragon rolled on it's side and momentarily Harry was free, but then felt himself squeezed and noticed that he was now in the clutches of the dragon's injured claw. More pressure built against his shield and finally it gave way and he felt one of the talons puncture his armor. He gasped in pain and tried once again to free himself. He didn't have enough energy to do it and was almost resigned to his unfortunate demise when the claw holding him sprung open and he dropped to the blood covered dirt below. He couldn't get up and found that he was face down in a puddle of the dragons' blood from the wound he inflicted in its belly. A strange sensation engulfed him, a sense of euphoria and he gave way and let it fill him.

Ginny couldn't believe what she was seeing. Harry Potter, the Chosen one, The Boy-Who-Lived, etcetera etcetera, was being taken down by a dragon. Never had she imagined the end being this way. If anything it was Voldemort or Dumbledore facing off against Harry that would be his possible end, but not this. The dragons' claw was

crushing him and she couldn't think. Suddenly a bright purple light shot out from behind her and struck the claw releasing her beloved who dropped like a stone to the earth. Remus and Tonks were shouting and trying to get her attention but all she could do was stare. There was so much blood and she wondered if some of it weren't from her Harry. She saw him try to get up and then collapse back to the ground. It didn't look like he was breathing. That fact alone is what stirred her into motion. She ran straight to him without regard to anything around her and pulled him to her. Turning him over, she saw his eyes closed and no breath coming from him. She pounded on his chest and noticed the gaping wound that went through his arm and the blood pumping from it and nearly lost it. Remus and Tonks were by her side and starting to administer healing charms and spells, but with little improvement to his condition. They did get him breathing again, but it wasn't stable. Ginny clenched her fist as rage overtook her and she grabbed Harry's sword and plunged it deep into the dragon's wound caused by Harry. She was determined to take the life of whatever was taking her Harry away from her. Twice, Three times she plunged the sword into the wound. She was crying hysterically now and was too exhausted to attempt it again. She leaned against the impaled sword and swore she wouldn't, couldn't go on if she lost Harry. The tears falling from her eyes mingled with the blood flowing out of the dragon and into the puddle of blood and dirt Harry was laying in. Somehow, this activated some type of ancient magic that lay dormant in all dragons. Harry jerked awake and screamed, causing Ginny to jerk around to find out what was going on. Remus and Tonks were trying to still the convulsing Harry.

"Stop!" Ginny shouted.

"What? Ginny he's....."Tonks resisted.

"No look. The bloods doing something to him. You need to back away."

Both Remus and Tonks looked to where Ginny was pointing and immediately sprung away from their young leader. Harry's armor and clothes were smoldering as if a fire was just put out. He was still convulsing, but the more smoke that arose, seemed to lessen the convulsions. From the middle of his chest a golden light was growing

and enveloping the rest of his body, once it covered his chest, it sprang to his arms and encircled them. Like an invisible foe was undressing him, his sleeves were ripped off exposing his scale grafts. The light seemed to focus on the grafts and then imploded into the grafts until nothing remained. Then the weirdest thing started happening. His grafts starting to come alive. They were circling his arms and twitching as if trying to extricate themselves from him. The circling quickened until it the grafts were a blur on Harry's arms. Then the light exploded into the air above him and the face of a golden dragon appeared and seemed to examine Harry's still form and how it was connected to it. Curiosity, got the better of the three observers and they drew closer to the vision until they attracted its attention. The head spun and its huge jaws snapped at the three as if warning them to stay back. Then it sniffed the air and took in the form of the unconscious dragon laying next to them all. The vision then dove into Harry's chest causing him to jerk from the impact. The light then jumped from Harry to the unconscious female dragon who also jerked in response to the strange light. The dragons' wounds were healing quickly but Harry's remained ragged and grotesque even though the bleeding had stopped.

The vision of the golden dragon once again appeared in front of Harry and turned to look at his friends. In a rich and deep voice slightly accented by an unknown dialect, it spoke to them.

"Take him from here quickly. All is well now. The dragons have returned to their nests and all who do not belong have been taken care of. For the one who has caused this, I will watch over until you return. If you should need me have him call and I will come." Then it was gone. So many questions flew through their heads, but were shaken back to action when the female dragon groaned and then started to roll over in an effort to regain her own feet. She didn't seem to take notice of any of them and if they didn't move quickly they would all be crushed. Remus grabbed Harry's arm and directed the others to grab onto him as he used the portkey to get them out of there.



## Chapter 25--Start of the End

The Senior Weasley's weren't sure what exactly was going on as they made their way to their directed positions. They were to guard the main entrance to the vaults with a team of 20 goblins. It was the entrance they and most other wizards were very familiar with, as it led to the carts that took them all down to their vaults.

It didn't escape their attention how quickly and succinctly the situation was directed, and by Harry no less. It struck them as quite peculiar that the goblins placed themselves in a subordinate role to him, and they couldn't fathom why this was. They weren't given much information about that situation nor about what was going on in Gringotts, but didn't feel it was their place to question anything. It hit hard at that point that there was so much that they didn't know.

They couldn't pinpoint where all this started. One minute they're celebrating Christmas and the next they're caught up in a very real battle within Gringotts of all places. The bank was known for its security and to have someone 'slip' in undetected chilled their hearts.

Neither of the Weasley parents were stupid by any means, naïve and gullible most definitely. So many things raced through their heads as if pounding this fact into their minds to make it painfully obvious. Harry's farce of a trial, where they were led to believe in the evil turn Harry had taken. Then the ministry's justification of turning over Harry's trust vault in recompense for killing their son, with the backing of their trusted leader, Albus Dumbledore. How easy it became to use that money over the year Harry was in Azkaban with the constant reinforcement that they were entitled to it. Harry's escape from the prison seemed only more validation of his guilt. It was like a slowly filling damn, piling up the evidence against the poor boy and their increasing animosity towards him. Then the crack formed and like any flaw burst that damn and the reasons for feeling and acting the way they did were eroding at a dangerous rate revealing the truth that lay beneath. They had thought it the end when Harry's innocence was proven, but the erosion continued and now they were looking at things they had never thought possible before.

They knew Harry was bound to face Voldemort in the end, they knew the prophecy, but how did that relate to his interactions with the goblins? Then his advanced grasp of magic from seemingly no-where, Remus and Tonks split with the Order and subsequent support of Harry, their own actions in withdrawing from the Order of the Phoenix, and now Ginny was caught up in it all. Surprisingly, they were quite proud of their daughter's achievements on her NEWTS but didn't really expect anything less. Ron's actions were more than troublesome. They didn't raise their children to act like he was currently. Like everything else that had been uncovered, they were sure there was more than met the eye about Ron's attitude.

Mrs. Weasley's thoughts pondered more on her children's actions, especially now that she had nothing else to do. The dragons running amok scared her more than anything. She had heard so many of Charlie's stories, even though he didn't realize she was listening, that all she really wanted to do was bundle them all up and take them home safely. Sighing she realized she couldn't do that anymore. This slight action caused her husband of many years to look at her, silently questioning if she were okay. Gathering her wits, she nodded sharply. This was almost exactly how she felt during the first war. She had lost her family then and never quite got over it. She swore to herself she wouldn't let that happen again. Last time she had hesitated, she had a chance now to change that in their current situation. No, she couldn't and wouldn't hesitate anymore. She had to trust her grown children unlike she was doing before. Yes, they were grown and more than capable of taking care of themselves. All except perhaps Ron, but it didn't mean she couldn't help in making sure they lived beyond all of this. In that moment she realized that her actions of late were only hindering her children and splitting their family apart. Instead of nurturing their growth, she smothered them to the point of their leaving to get out from under her. She now understood with clarity what the others had been trying to tell her. She was proud of their action to break from the Order, and wondered if that hadn't been the turning point in their way of thinking. No longer was there anywhere to hide or safely remove themselves until the war was over. It would eventually reach out and engulf them wherever they ran to. It would never be over until Voldemort was taken care of. He would continue to fester and spread his vile influence like the weeds of her garden if not cut off.

If she didn't fight for her family than who would? How could she expect others to protect her family and fight against that vile snake and his murderers if she wasn't willing to do it? The prior Ministry had proven they weren't capable or willing to stand against those common criminals, although the current ministry she had to give some credit to for the actions they were taking. Maybe not enough but it was definitely better than before. No matter though, the bottom line was that she saw what was going on for what it really was and could not hide from it anymore. Visibly her stance changed again attracting the attention of her husband. This time she looked straight at him causing him to do a double take at the look of defiant strength gleaming in her eyes.

"Molly?"

"When we're done here Arthur, we're going to have a very long talk about our youngest son." She said with force, daring him to defy or challenge her.

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Bill on the other hand didn't have time for much contemplation as was allotted to his parents. Only 20 minutes had gone by when Bill's team leader was directed to take his team to another part of the catacombs. He was already sweating from the exertion of checking protection ward after protection ward looking for any kind of minute fracture or anomaly that would indicate some kind of tampering. Now they were quickly making their way deeper into the tunnels where the more lucrative vaults were housed. He welcomed the break and the cooler temperatures, but was stunned when they were told to seek out hidden individuals. They weren't to do anything with them, just report their location to the team chief. He couldn't understand how anyone could be hidden from the goblins down here. The map up in the war room had managed to locate the one individual they did know about, how did it not pick up any others? He was also under the impression that without goblin escort, anyone attempting to find their way within the bank would become horribly lost. His minding whirling, certain thoughts started to coalesce. Maybe, the one individual wanted to be

found? Did they have some kind of foreknowledge or map of the underground? Maybe they had a cloaking or masking spell that was able to fool the goblins security systems? Was the individual leading the goblins away from the others for some reasons, possibly even into an ambush? It started falling into place; someone was leading an elaborate attack against the bank in order to rob it! No, not to rob it, to take it over! They were slowly but methodically taking out goblins with their own dragons! How though, were they controlling the dragons? When he got the chance he was going to have to ask his dragon lover brother about that.

Before any more thoughts could form, he heard the goblins shouting to one another in gobbledygook. It looked like some sort of disagreement had arisen. He couldn't understand all of it, but from bits and pieces he could understand he compiled enough to make him smirk at their ingenuity. They weren't fighting, but to anyone that didn't understand their language it would look like exactly that. What they were really discussing was the discovery of a pocket of hidden wizards in the alcove up the tunnel from them. They didn't want those wizards to think they had been found. This way, no alarm or signal could be sent to any others hiding in the bank. The ruse would allow the goblins to continue to look without appearing that way, affording them the time needed to bring in reinforcements and locate the other renegades.

Sharptongue came over to Bill and relayed quietly what they had found. "Harry Potter was right to have us check this area. There are three wizards masking their magic in the next alcove. I have sent a team ahead to check the rest of this area as well as alerting other teams throughout the bank how to spot these hidden scum. So far this is the only spot they have chosen for their contemptible acts. Stormtooth is working to update the map to make sure and give us forewarning of any others. Five of our warriors are to remain here with you. They will act as if they have you under arrest. I do not think these evil men know of you but stay in the shadows just in case. I need you to act accordingly; do not fight until I give the signal. Reinforcements will portkey in to prearranged locations once all the thieves have been found."

Bill didn't bother to question the goblin. He had worked with them long enough to know better. In the current situation, it wouldn't look good either as it might give away the ruse the goblins were trying to pull off. The fact that more attackers remained hidden within the bank, sent chills down his spine. He only hoped his family was safe. When the reinforcements arrived he was sure he would have no time to worry about anything.

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Charlie unlike the rest of his family, found himself in the thick of things immediately after portkeying with his team of goblins. As soon as his feet touched the ground he felt something slam into his back and found himself with a face full of mud and something that smelled coppery. He barely turned his head when he saw a giant razor sharp claw sweep through air where he had been standing a second ago. Once the claw passed, the goblin, Flamespear, rolled off of him and started shouting orders to his team. Dazed, Charlie didn't comprehend the orders. He rolled away from where he landed not wanting to give the attacking dragon an easy target and tried to take in the scene surrounding him. Being around dragons for as long as he had, he thought he had seen just about everything. This however, was one of worst possible scenarios, one that could only be dreamed up in a nightmare.

There were at least five dragons that he could see leaping, flying, swiping with their deadly claws and tails, and breathing fire in one of the largest underground caverns he had ever seen. Goblins were dancing about the very agile dragons trying to avoid their own deaths while attempting to bring them back under control. There were no words to explain what he was seeing. The brief had vastly underestimated these dragons current mentality. It was as if they had been struck with a vicious bloodlust.

Blood, bodies and body parts littered the floor of the cavern making it a precarious task to maintain a foothold, let alone try to fight. The agility of the goblins greatly impressed him, as he tried and failed several times to stand. Not twenty feet in front of him an unlucky goblin slipped on the remains of one of his brothers-in-arms. He

never had a chance to regain his feet as massive jaws clamped onto him. Throwing it's head back, the dragon lifted the doomed goblin violently into the air. The lower half of the goblin continued to fly in an arch over the dragons head while it's upper half remained in the dragons' mouth. Charlie watched the legs of the former goblin until they hit the cavern wall and slid sickeningly down it leaving a swath of blood and gore to document its passing.

Behind him he heard another scream and jerked around to see another goblin that had been caught in a similar predicament. The dragon bit down with one tremendous jolt silencing the horrible scream and separating the limbs from the rest of the goblin. One of the arms dropped and hit another goblin who was in the middle of casting a spell. Momentarily stunned, the goblin stepped to a more secure footing, ignored the gore staining him and began casting once again.

Seeing all this Charlie gulped hard and swore to whatever being was watching over them that he would take all life more seriously and finally ask Samantha to marry him if he got out of this alive. He had been stringing her along now for three years while hiding their relationship from his family. He had not been sure if he was ready to settle down. This moment clenched it for him.

Knowing that sitting around wasn't going to help achieve his goals; he quenched down his fear and jumped into the fight using the strongest spells he knew to try to restrain the dragons. He was flinging spells as quickly as he could and keeping a wary eye out around him. Never in his life had he fought so hard or so long. The stronger spells took a lot of energy to cast and he could feel exhaustion setting in. Dodging and trying to stand firm on the slippery ground was also impacting his ability to continue the fight. He could feel his clothes clinging to him from the sweat running off him in droves. Then when he thought he couldn't fight anymore, the dragons calmed. His senses heightened as if waiting for some deception to reveal itself. Never had he heard of dragons backing down from a fight of their own accord. The goblins as well were looking around suspiciously. It seemed they were just as confused as he was.

A great gust of wind buffeted through the cavern, chilling the sweat on his body and cooling him. Although a welcome relief to the intense heat that had consumed them all previously, he was worried as to its source. The wind continued to pick up and seemed to be coming from one of the larger tunnels leading out from the cave. A few seconds later an enormous male flew through the tunnel and to one of the larger nests situated near the back wall. It was then Charlie realized why the dragons were so incensed. Not only were they protecting the nests, but someone had stolen one of their precious eggs!

Fred and George, relegated to guard duty at the VIP entrance to the vaults, were thoroughly bored. They were greatly offended by this menial task. Their talents could be put to much better use than they were currently engaged in. Minutes seemed to tick by as their minds invented bigger and better ways in which to trap the scoundrel causing havoc below. The fact that their family members were fighting didn't really dissuade their thinking. They knew everyone would be okay. It was a childish innocence they had never really outgrown, something they felt deep within their souls and nothing to worry about.

The minutes ticked by and soon the twins grew restless of just idly thinking. First Fred then George looked up and with determination started to march forward in lock step deeper into the tunnel. They ignored the shouted commands of the goblin commander to stop. When they came to the juncture of where the tunnel they were guarding branched out into several towards the vaults, the twins stopped and surveyed the area with a critical eye.

Without a word the two set to work with an audience of Goblins staring on in bewilderment. None tried to stop them as they couldn't believe what they were seeing.

Bill couldn't imagine what was taking so long for the re-enforcements to arrive. As every second passed, his anxiety increased. A tap on his shoulder caused him to nearly jump out of his skin. Literally he found he had actually jumped, but only in such a way as to remove himself from the unknown presence which he was now facing. It was Sharptongue of all people!

“What.....?” he started.

“SHHHHHHH!” the goblin hushed while waving others to come forward. “Re-enforcements have arrived and all 20 intruders’ locations ferreted out.” Sharptongue whispered. “Now we attack! We will crush them between our two forces like a Clopnar crushes the Winkle.”

“Huh?” Bill responded.

Sharptongue looked up at Bills confused face. “Like your Lion and Mouse?”

“Oh, got it, right.....” Bill let it slide. He would never get used to Goblins analogies.

“We have received word that all the Dragons are contained. How we do not know and it doesn’t matter. We will find out later. Our mission is those thieves. We start forward immediately driving them towards our brethren at the rear gates.”

Bill wasn’t exactly sure where the rear gates were, but he could only hope none of his family was stationed there. From the numbers, there were quite a few dark wizards that would fight tooth and nail. He was anxious to find out about Charlie, but pushed it back. Right now he needed to concentrate on the task ahead as the goblins were already pressing forward to the first alcove and the first known location of said dark wizards.

With a shout the goblins surrounded the alcove and one shouted a counter curse in gobbledygook revealing three surprised wizards. One of whom happened to be Bellatrix LeStrange. It was disturbing to see a look of surprise on her evil face when normally it wore one of snarling rabid rage or mockery.

It didn’t take but a couple of seconds for her to react though, and she started shrieking like a banshee trying to warn the others they had been found out. She immediately tore into the goblin ranks with death and torture curses with reckless abandon. The remaining two wizards followed her lead and soon broke away from the goblin detachment



and were running straight in the direction of the rear gates where the goblins had intended them to go.

Fred and George had just finished putting the coup-de-grace on their little experiment. They hoped that it would get a chance to shine. Their goblin leader seemed otherwise engaged and they pouted a little at the lack of attention. A moment later, the goblin leader turned to them and spoke in accented English.

“Whatever you two have planned will be proven or have failed in the next 10 minutes. Goblins prepare your selves! We have incoming!”

Fred and George looked at each other with uncontained glee and excitement rubbing their hands together in anticipation. Then without another word, they followed the goblins lead and found a large stalagmite to hide behind that offered a bit of protection.

The wait was agonizingly slow for the two brothers. Just when they thought they couldn't bare it anymore the first of the wizards appeared in the center of the juncture. The wizard stopped to look around but immediately snapped-to and started to spin like a top as he was encased in spider silk. It was readily apparent the wizard was no longer in the battle, but instead of remaining on the ground, the rope like silk snapped taught and jerked the cocoon into the air and out of sight.

More Death Eaters started flooding into the area and chaos sprung to life to the orchestration of the Weasley twin's dastardly twisted minds. Ice hulks formed around several wizards and witches when they tried to kick at scurrying mice running around trying to climb up their robes. More spider silk shot through the crowd picking off more unsuspecting humans. Others were being chased around by what looked like hobgoblins, a smaller nastier cousin of the goblins. Nothing seemed to affect the menacing creatures. Small puffs of white powder occasionally sprung into the air indicating some other nefarious trap was set off. In fact those that had the unfortunate luck to run into the “powder puffs” were soon laying on the ground focused only on itching themselves to death. Those Death Eaters that made it through the traps unharmed were finally stopped short within the

infamous transportable swamps. The fight was over before it had really begun and while the twins were rolling on the ground with tears in their eyes from laughing too hard, the goblins could only look on in utter amazement and wonder at what had been accomplished. Soon the only sound that filled the juncture was that of the two red-headed demons who pulled off this magnificent achievement.

Pounding feet echoed louder in tunnel, while the twins carried on. Soon the rear detachment of goblins that was herding the Death Eaters forward came into view. Among their numbers was a larger version of the two red-heads still rolling on the ground oblivious to all around them. Bill took in the site around him and started chuckling. He was well acquainted with the twin's mischievous trinkets. They had purported themselves better than anyone could have ever thought, but upon thinking this, it all somehow fit logically into the scheme of things.

Bill walked over to his younger brothers and literally yanked them up by the collar of their necks shocking them both silent until they caught the gleam in Bills eyes. Bill hugged them both fiercely and then turned to Sharptongue for orders. The goblins seemed too surprised to move until Sharptongue addressed the three Weasley's. "This is your doing?" at there slightly reluctant nods he continued. "We may have business to talk about in the future if you are willing?"

Fred and George looked at Bill whose eyes had bugged out at the implications. Excitement filling them, the twins tried to appear calm but eagerly grabbed Sharptongues hands and shot out in unison, "When do you want to meet?"

Sharptongues grin grew wider as he led the twins off to the side after directing the others with the cleanup.

Meanwhile, while the battle was going strong inside the bank, outside a crowd had started forming. It wasn't every day that Gringotts actually locked itself down, so it didn't go unnoticed by those lingering in Diagon Alley. When protests from people trying to get in to get their money began making their way down the alley, more and more people took notice. It didn't take long for the rumors to start flying far beyond the denizens of the alley. Mad-Eye Moody just happened to

be watching Knockturn Alley when word caught his ear of the banks closure. As quickly as he could, he made his way up to the doors of Gringotts to check for himself. With the tick crowd growing by the minute, he was quickly angering many of the people he was not so gently shoving out of his way. His attempts to figure out what was going on failed just like anyone else's. There was no new information to be had and that only intensified his suspicions.

Moody sent off a patronus to Kingsley who was located in the Leaky Cauldron to inform Dumbledore of the situation and get other order members here quickly. He didn't state why he thought more members should be on hand, he thought that would be obvious. Sometimes Moody forgot that to assume things all the time meant that it would make an "ASS out of U and Me". He would regret forgetting that adage.

Back at Gringotts, Stormtooth was shocked when Harry's team arrived so soon. He hadn't thought they would be able to resolve the situation so quickly. Looking them over he realized with dread that their ambassador and friend was being held by the wizard known as Remus. He looked quickly to the women and saw their tear streaked faces and burst into action. After summoning the healers he led Remus to a couch to lay Harry down upon. No sooner had they placed him down than the healers arrived and started directing the others in various tasks while they examined their patient.

Remus explained to Stormtooth as best he could about the situation while at the same time completing the tasks assigned by the healers. He was also trying to keep a watchful eye on Harry, Ginny and Tonks as they hadn't the time to talk about what happened and didn't know how they were affected. Ginny didn't look too good and was barely able to finish her tasks. She wanted to sit by Harry's side not realizing how that would interfere with the healers work. The healers were patient though and kept gently pulling her away to complete other tasks. They were menial, but it took her mind off of Harry for a short while each time.

Tonks on the other hand remained stoic even though a tear would occasionally slip down her face. Knowing Tonks, it would be later that

she would collapse with the weight of emotion she was holding back now.

Harry on the other hand was still out and that worried him more than he could say. He couldn't tell exactly what the goblin healers were doing, goblin magic was still incomprehensible to him, but it didn't look like they were getting anywhere.

After only 20 minutes the healers stopped their work, which angered the others. Before any of them could protest, what looked like the head healer held up her hands to still their comments and spoke. "Our goblin magic is not effective. He needs the aid of your wizard healers. St. Mungo's is where he must go. His breathing is stable, but his wound is a most curious one. There is magic there that, I am reluctant to admit, is beyond our understanding. It may be something that is peculiar to your kind, or maybe not. We have not had many chances to work on humans before. There is nothing more we can do for him here." With that said, she started packing up her things and the other goblins followed suit.

Ginny, now quite coherent immediately spoke up with distress evident in her voice. "Please, you must do something. We can't take him to St. Mungo's. It's too risky. If anyone finds out...he's not ready for that yet. We're not ready for that yet."

Tonks wrapped the younger woman in an embrace trying to comfort her while speaking softly into her ear. "Ginny, you heard the healer. We must take him to St. Mungo's. We'll all be there with him to protect him. It's the only chance we have right now. You know in your heart it's the right thing to do."

"Tonks is right Ginny. I think between the three of us we can fend off anyone trying to get at Harry. We just took down a dragon for Merlin's sake." Remus said jokingly, trying to lighten the mood. It was a dire situation and he was as worried as the others but they really had no choice at this juncture and someone needed to make sure they remained level headed. They could not serve Harry's needs if they broke down now. He only hoped that Harry would find the help he needed at the wizard hospital. Gathering Harry into his arms once again, he reached out to grab the portkey Stormtooth provided. Once

Ginny and Tonks were touching it, he said the password and they were gone.

Stormtooth watched them leave, then immediately contacted Rack'N'stack to inform him of the situation. The goblin leader was not happy when he heard the news about Harry. The wound he received from the dragon was most puzzling and worrisome at the same time. He would bet all his gold that something very peculiar was about to happen to their ambassador. For better or worse he couldn't say but hoped it would be in their favor. He ordered Stormtooth to finish the clean-up at the bank and then send a dozen of their best goblin warriors to St. Mungos to guard their ambassador. He was sure somehow that the news of Harry's appearance at St. Mungo's would not go unnoticed.

Remus and the other's arrived at St Mungo's without fanfare. It didn't seem to faze any of the staff that another badly injured wizard just happened to appear needing help. Looking around the waiting room, there were many that were in various stages of need. The fact that they were all wearing their battle robes and had obviously been in a fierce fight; was the only thing that set them apart from the rest.

An orderly approached Tonks and started asking questions to ascertain the care needed for the intended patient. Tonks faltered for a moment when asked the name of the patient. Looking to Remus for guidance, he stepped in for her and provided the required information while still holding the unconscious subject.

"His name is James Roper." He supplied simply.

The orderly didn't seem phased by the name, to the relief of the four, and ordered a stretcher for Mr. Roper's immediate admittance to the emergency ward. So far everything seemed to be running smoothly and it didn't look like they would encounter any more problems.

Remus placed Harry on the stretcher and then followed the entourage of healers up to the emergency ward. With a few wisely placed spells, the three had no problem remaining in the ward with Harry while they tried to work on him.

Unbeknownst to any of them, one of the orderlies had recognized the name of the Goblin Ambassador. Conveniently he just happened to be going on his lunch break and slipped out unnoticed. Once outside he sent off a patronus to the one person he knew would appreciate the information he had to share.

Back in Diagon Alley, Mad-eye Moody was surprised to receive a Patronus message from one of his former students. The man had been working at St. Mungo's for quite some time now and periodically kept him informed on suspicious events at the wizard hospital. The information he had provided had never added up to much in the past, but he was now glad that he had continued to groom that relationship.

As quick as he could hobble, Moody made his way back through the thick crowd to the Leaky Cauldron angering more people as he shoved his way through. Using the fireplace he floo-called Albus and then stepped into the fire calling out St. Mungo's.

He had barely arrived when Dumbledore and more order members started showing up. Without any announcement, Dumbledore sent a spell at the desk orderly who appeared dazed and confused upon being hit. His actions weren't questioned by any of his conspirators. The patients in the waiting area were too timid to stand up to the Greatest Wizard of the age and so remained quiet pretending they didn't notice a thing.

Dumbledore searched the orderly's mind for the information needed and when he found it, set off without a word, fully expecting his entourage to follow.

Meanwhile in the emergency ward, the healers were becoming frantic trying to work on Mr. Roper. Nothing they had tried had been successful in removing the wizards' robes so they could attend to his wounds. If they were going to save him, those robes had to come off. At his wits end, the head healer turned to Remus.

"Sir, It is imperative we remove his robes! If there is some way you know of to remove them, I implore you to do so now!"

Remus looked over at Harry then back to the healer, his anxiety becoming evident on his face. "I...I don't know how, maybe..."

"I know" Ginny whispered.

"What was that?" Remus asked turning to her in surprise. He wasn't sure he had heard her correctly.

"I know how to remove his robes, but I will require an unbreakable vow from everyone that you will not reveal what you see once the robes are removed."

The healer blinked considering her unusual request. The other healers hearing her stopped as well and looked to their boss for guidance. Determining that the vow wasn't asking any more than their Hippocratic Oaths already given, he acquiesced to the request. "Very well, let's get this done quickly."

So without any fanfare they took the requested oath.

Ginny leaned over Harry and whispered the password she had been entrusted with and warned only to use in dire circumstances. Her heart battled with her mind over whether or not this qualified. It was done now though and she couldn't take it back.

Soft clicks resounded like explosions in the dead silence of the room as the battle robes magic unleashed its bindings from its master. The hood and robes seemed to liquefy and then peel away revealing the man and armor underneath. Then the armor released and swiftly detached itself appearing on a chair next to Harry.

Halfway through this process though, Ginny's worst nightmare came to pass as the double doors leading into the ward banged open and Dumbledore and his lackeys stormed in with wands drawn. In an instant Remus, Tonks and Ginny were surrounding Harry, ready to protect him no matter the cost.

Dumbledore ignored the three cloaked figures, instead concentrating on his nemesis lying on the emergency table. What he saw there completely flabbergasted him.

“Harry!?” Dumbledore exclaimed, attracting everyone’s attention to where he was focused. Dumbledore couldn’t imagine the circumstances that had caused Harry to turn up in the hospital, but he thought he could use this in an attempt to solidify his argument that Harry was safer at Hogwarts. If this was truly Harry, then that also meant that one of the cloaked figures was Remus and would also serve to bolster the fact that the man couldn’t protect young Harry. What he couldn’t figure out is why the young orderly thought this was James Roper. He was sure he read her memories correctly and was in the right room. Even the wound inflicted on Harry matched the orderly’s memories. His eyes scanned the boy intensely then grew wide as he spotted the pendant that lay around the boys’ neck. It couldn’t be! There must be some other explanation. He moved forward intent on inspecting the pendant closer.

“Don’t move Dumbledore,” a female voice spoke harshly.

Dumbledore looked up to see three wands pointed at him. He looked behind him and saw his five Order members in a likewise stance, wands pointed at the three wizards.

Taking a chance to confirm his suspicions, Dumbledore addressed the three as yet unknowns. “Remus, I don’t know what’s going on here, but lets get Harry back to Hogwarts where he will be safe.”

Gasps at his comment echoed through the room.

“That won’t be happening Dumbledore. As you can see he is in need of medical attention. He won’t be going anywhere until that has happened.” Ginny firmly stated giving up any pretense of denying Harry’s presence or confirming any suspicions the headmaster might have.

“He’s right Albus. Let’s use the time we have to find James Roper. We can come back for the boy later. By the looks of things he won’t be going anywhere anytime soon.” Moody stated not able to detect the individuals behind the cloaks.



Dumbledore chuckled mirthlessly. "Don't you see my friends? They are one and the same. That pendant is the symbol of the goblin nation. The symbol was bestowed upon their ambassador to ensure he wasn't mistaken as someone else. It is the same pendant worn around the ambassador James Roper's neck each time he has appeared before the Wizengamot. None can remove it except the leader of the goblin nation."

More gasp sounded at this revelation and all eyes sought out the pendant.

"But Albus, how can this be possible?" Minerva questioned. "It doesn't fit. Harry was at school each and every time James Roper met with the Wizengamot." She was astonished at the accusation and didn't know what to believe anymore.

"I believe we can resolve this once we get Harry back to Hogwarts. Remus, you and your friends will be joining us to shed some light on all of this." Dumbledore stated broking no argument.

"Either you are deaf or not listening Albus Dumbledore. He will not be leaving with anyone until he is healed."

"My dear Miss Weasley, he will receive the finest care at Hogwarts. Now if..."

"Enough!" Shouted Remus; shocking everyone present with the strength of command in his voice. "You may think you can order everyone around without question Albus but you are wrong. You have no idea what is going on here and I'm not about to let you waltz in here to kidnap this man just as you please. He has committed no crime and if I recall correctly you have no jurisdiction anywhere but at Hogwarts. These healers are the best there are and no amount of sweet-talking is going to convince me that Hogwarts can provide better treatment than here. What is the real reason behind moving him Albus?"

"As I have stated all along, I only have the best interest at heart for young Harry. I..."

“That’s a load of dragon dung and you know it! It might work on the rest of these foolhardy minions of yours, but it won’t work with us. Why don’t you tell them what you plan to do with Harry once he’s back at Hogwarts.”

“I have no idea what you are talking about Miss Weasley. I only fear that Mr. Potter may have fallen in with the wrong crowd and is being influenced negatively by this. I wish only to remedy the situation and bring him back to the light.”

“I grow weary of your inane babbling Dumbledore. That’s not quite the truth now is it. Maybe you don’t even know what the truth is anymore? With all the lies you’ve weaved over the years do you even know what is real anymore? If you won’t or can’t state the truth then maybe it is up to us to reveal it?”

“I don’t know who you are miss, but I assure you I am quite capable of knowing the reality of a situation. Who are you to question me anyway? What relations do you have with Harry?”

“That my doddering old buffoon is none of your business. All you need know is I’m a protector of Harry and will do all in my power to keep him out of your grasp. Tell them of your nefarious scheme to bind Harry to you.”

“What’s the girl babbling about Albus?” Moody demanded, bewildered at this conversation.

“I have no idea my old friend.” Dumbledore answered once again. The twinkle in his eyes seemed to grow more intense. Moody and the others staring directly at their mentor and leader seemed to back down upon seeing them and accept his word without further inquest. Turning to the three once again, he didn’t get the same reaction.

“That will no longer work on us Albus, so don’t waste your efforts.” Remus spoke confidently puzzling the Order members as to his meaning. “You no longer have any influence over us. Harry will not be leaving! Why don’t you tell them about the potion you have ready to administer to Harry upon his arrival at Hogwarts? A potion that would bind him to you; a potion that would prevent him from ever acting

against your will; a potion so heinous it was outlawed long ago by the Ministry as it removed all free will of the recipient.”

Once again gasps filled the room at this accusation and all turned to the Headmaster waiting for his response. “Your insinuation deeply aggrieves me. What have I done to so repulse you that you would contrive such falsitudes?”

“Oh I can’t believe this! Get over it old man, don’t act so distressed. If you say you have a grip on reality, than you know exactly what we’re talking about. Stop lying to the people whom have placed their trust, their LIVES, in your hands.” Ginny nearly screamed beyond frustrated with the ongoing machinations.

It seemed that the gasping was becoming a regular event at each new revelation that was exposed.

“My friends, there is obviously some great misunderstanding here. If we go back to Hogwarts, I’m sure we can work it all out. I have no intention what-so-ever of performing the deeds Remus has spoken of.”

“You may not Albus Dumbledore, but that doesn’t prevent you from having some other unsuspecting party administer the potion to Harry with the same results.” Ginny sneered.

Before Dumbledore could answer, a team of twelve goblin warriors entered the ward encircling Harry and his friends, further crowding the small ward.

“What is the meaning of this?” Minerva exclaimed.

“We are here to protect the Ambassador. Remove yourselves immediately.” The lead warrior stated.

“This is insane!” the normally stoic Transfiguration professor uncharacteristically screeched throwing her hands up into the air.

“Leave or we will consider this a breach of the treaty most recently enacted!”

"I am afraid you are mistaken my dear goblin as to the current situation." Dumbledore tried to manipulate, taking a chance that the goblins were not aware of James Ropers' true identity. "We only wish to return a student to Hogwarts where he belongs."

"Do not play us for fool's wizard! We know you are aware of this man's status as our ambassador. You also know he is protected by law from your meddling as we have confirmed that you received notification of his withdrawal from your school. You have no right to be here, so remove yourselves!"

"What is he talking about? When did Harry remove himself from Hogwarts? I thought he considered it the closest thing to home?" Minerva probed sounding like a broken record for the many times she had asked similar questions receiving no answers. She was beyond frustrated with this whole mess. Somewhere in the middle of this predicament lay the truth but it seemed they were unsuccessful in ferreting it out.

Dumbledore couldn't believe what was going on. They had no right to treat him this way. First they banned him from Gringotts and stole from him now they were demanding his removal from a place he had every right to be. It seemed there was no end to the lengths to which these goblins would go to overstep their bounds. Everything that had transpired as of late welled up within him and without thinking he shot a spell towards Harry that would draw the boy to him. No one saw that coming and didn't have time to react. The spell hit its target, but nothing happened.

Nothing happened that is until the scales on Harry's arms came alive once again. To the astonishment of those who had not been privy to this before, the golden dragon appeared again.

"Albus Dumbledore, you have proven your unworthiness for the cause you claim to fight for. You're craven attack against one unable to defend himself has shown your fraudulent claim for his best interests. Your fate will be decided in kind. All who side with you will likewise be judged when it is time. For now you have condemned the

wizarding world. The one you seek to control will no longer be within your grasp.”

With that said, a bright light engulfed the ward blinding the inhabitants. When it cleared and spots no longer stung their eyes, Harry along with his three friends were gone. Not a scrap of anything belonging to them remained. There was no trace of whatever magic was used. It was as if they had never been there.

The goblins were nonplussed by the disappearance and with a quick look around, they left without a word.

Dumbledore on the other hand was about to pop a vein in his forehead. “FIND THEM!” he bellowed.

“But Albus, they are gone and there is no trace to begin from. Be reasonable.” Minerva tried to explain. Reaching out to calm him, she pulled away as if scalded when he turned abruptly to her. The rage she saw in his eyes scared her to her core. Never had she seen anything remotely like it on her friends face.

“Minerva’s right Albus. They ain’t here. There’s nobody hiding and if that dragon figure is correct, I don’t think we’ll be finding any of them any time soon.”

“Alastor, it’s imperative we find them now.”

“Headmaster, why is it so important? We’ve spent the summer looking for them and the last month and a half to no avail.”

“I agree with Damon. We’ve wasted too many resources up ‘til now looking for the boy. Nothings changed. We don’t have anything more to go on.”

“Oh but we do my friend. When the Wizengamot learns of the true identity of James Roper they’ll force Gringotts to relinquish their ambassadors’ appointment.”

“You’re talking outright war with the goblins Albus! We can’t deal with them and Voldemort at the same time. We’d be signing our own death warrants.”

“You don’t understand!” Dumbledore grated between his teeth. He was furious to learn that Harry was James Roper and the implications were just now hitting home. How dare that little upstart do this to him.

“Then please explain Albus, we’re waiting.” Minerva sighed heavily. She just wanted to go home and soak in a nice hot bath and oblivate her memories of this day.

Albus took a moment to calm himself and like an electric switch, his demeanor changed back to the grandfatherly figure they knew and were most comfortable with.

“Don’t you see my friends, if Harry is James Roper than that can only mean they are in league with this Mysterious wizard. That is who has been training Harry and has beguiled the boy into enacting his own abhorrent plans. These are not the actions of Harry Potter. Now, Remus and Miss Weasley have been corrupted as well. We need to bring them all back to the light.”

“Albus, I think you may need to check in here and get yourself examined. Nothing you’re saying makes any sense. Before you stated, claiming irrevocable proof, that James Roper and the mysterious wizard were one in the same. Now your saying Harry and James Roper are the same wizard. What’s next? Are you going to claim Harry’s the Mysterious wizard and that all three are the same man?” Alastor spoke gruffly, half joking and half serious.

“I was mistaken, please forgive me, but I know now the truth of the matter. Somehow this mysterious wizard broke Harry out of Azkaban and has been training him ever since. There is no other explanation for Harry’s acceleration of learning. If we don’t discover what he is planning all may be lost.”

“All this doom and gloom you all keep spouting is making me rethink my involvement in this Order.”

“Shut it, Macon.” Alastor chastised.

The Order members didn't really hear Macon's comment as they were staring at their leader in disbelief. Once they saw those twinkling eyes again though, all thought of asking anymore questions or rebuking his arguments flew from their thoughts.

When the Headmaster and the others returned to Hogwarts they found the news had already been leaked. The students as well as the professors were all discussing the events causing a loud hum to persist throughout the Great Hall.

As it was dinner, everyone was thought present until Ronald Weasley came sauntering into the hall. It seemed as though he hadn't heard the news. Dumbledore watched from his seat at the head table trying to block out the obnoxious stories warped from the little information there was to go on. He was also trying to figure out where his potions master was. Severus had stated through private missive he would be back this evening. Maybe he would be later than originally expected, but it was just as troubling. He didn't need anything else going wrong at this point.

Ron, upon entering the Great Hall didn't even notice the rumors going around. His stomach was in control at the moment as he sought out his regular seat by Hermione. He didn't even notice how disturbed his girlfriend looked as he shoveled food onto his plate and began the grotesque ritual he called eating.

Halfway through his dinner the sounds around him began to sink into the fog engrossing his mind. Upon hearing his ex-friend Harry's name for the fifth time, his anger started growing. Finally, he had enough hearing about poor Harry Potter and stormed out of the hall without a word to anyone. So incensed, he didn't see Luna until he ran right into her.

Luna recovered quickly and looked up to see the red-faced, red-head. “Why Ronald, you should really mind those Toma Toe Flies infesting your head.”

Taken aback by her outlandish comment, he didn't know how to respond. Then heard Harry's name again. "Shut it Looney!" he sneered.

Luna continued impervious to his crassness. "I've heard they are really nasty, especially to tomatoes. My Father tried to grow them but the infestation ruined them. Although it could be just the fact that tomatoes are known for bursting when they get to full of themselves."

"What's that suppose to mean?"

"Oh nothing. Just watch them so your head doesn't explode."

Scoffing at Luna's strange story, Ron continued out of the hall and didn't think twice about it.

Somewhere off the coast of Britain, the three plus Harry arrived in a dark cavern or hall of some sort. Their wands drawn, they tried to ascertain where they were. After a few minutes, the golden dragon appeared before them.

"Not to worry friends of Harry. You are in a safe place, one that has not been blessed with the presence of wizard kind for thousands of years. It has remained hidden until one worthy of its secrets proves himself. I am the keeper of this place and have protected it since the passing of the wizard you call Merlin. Young Harry has unknowingly but successfully fulfilled the tasks laid out for him to inherit Merlin's legacy. When he battled the dragon out of self defense and its blood mixed with his, I awoke. The scales he had bonded to himself were what remained of my mortal self and had been passed down through Merlin's heirs seeking the destined one."

"How can Harry take Merlin's place if he doesn't live to see tomorrow?!" Ginny bemoaned, not caring about the phenomenal proclamation that Harry would replace Merlin.

"As I have said, this place holds many secrets. Although I am only a shadow of what I once was, I can direct you in what must be done to completely heal young Harry. The life magic held within your tears Ginevra has already begun to heal him for there is no greater power



than love. Once he awakens, this place will be his and any he deems worthy to share it with him."

"What does it mean exactly that Harry will take Merlin's place?" Tonks asked excited at the prospect of what this might mean.

"Nym, we can discuss that later. Let's get to work on Harry." Remus redirected.

"Very well, first I need to transfer the knowledge of this place to all of you. This will make our task easier."

Voldemort was not happy. He knew that the attack on Gringotts had somehow failed. None of his Death Eaters, including Snape, had returned. Whether it was by design or his attack had been thwarted by the goblins he didn't know. All he had to ruminate on were the rumors that were going around about Harry Potter being James Roper. The bearers of this news had been severely cursed in an attempt to relieve his deluge of rage. If Malfoy Sr. was still alive, he would have made the bungling idiot pay even more dearly.

The one piece of good fortune that presented itself was that now James Roper...or Harry Potter was out of the picture. For how long he didn't know, but he would not squander the opportunity that presented itself. The world would regret ever opposing him. Without their savior, the wizarding world would tremble before his might on bended knee. He would take over and then deal with those insurrectionary goblins.

The next day in the Great Hall of Hogwarts, Ron was once again trying unsuccessfully to eat his breakfast when through the double doors walked his entire family, minus his sister. They didn't stop to talk to him, but continued to walk up to the head table. He thought maybe they had come to their senses and were going to rejoin the Order.

Hermione remained quiet by his side perplexed. She watched intently trying to hear what was going on over the commotion the new arrivals caused. The Headmaster remained seated watching and waiting for what was to come.

“Headmaster Dumbledore, I apologize for this interruption, but we are here to remove our son.”

Ron upon hearing this jumped to his feet. “You can’t do that, I’m of age!” he screamed as he stormed up to them.

“I agree with young Mr. Weasley, Arthur. He is of age and therefore may decide for himself whether he is to stay or not.” Albus spoke deceptively calmly.

“As head of the House Weasley, I have every right to determine where and with whom my family are to be educated. Funds for his tuition to Hogwarts have been cancelled and Ronald will be returning home with us this day.”

“I am afraid that is not possible. New legislation passed this year prevents students from withdrawing from Hogwarts before their NEWTs are completed.”

“That’s not quite the truth Albus Dumbledore, as you are well aware of that law. If I’m not mistaken, you wrote it and sponsored it through the Wizengamot.” Stated the voice of Amelia Bones as she entered the Hall.

“I was not aware that I would be entertaining a visit from you Minister.”

“That would be because I didn’t send any notification, what with the state of affairs lately. It was really too risky to send notice ahead that could be intercepted.”

Dumbledore had no response and so simply remained quiet.

“The law the Headmaster is referring to does not restrict individuals from leaving Hogwarts, it only provides that young wizards and witches complete their NEWTS before being considered an adult and entering into a profession. This is in an attempt to keep them from performing magic that may be dangerous to themselves and others. If they do not pass their NEWTs they will remain in school until they are

ready to try again. Both Mr. and Mrs. Weasley have outlined a plan for young Ronald's education in order to complete his NEWTs on time with the rest of his class. You'll find that the Board has already agreed after hearing the reasoning behind Mr. Weasley's request. The Ministry of Education has also agreed and has scheduled his exams accordingly."

"Thank you for the explanation Minister but I...."

"Headmaster, meeting with you today has only been an extended courtesy to inform you of Ronald's removal. You have no say in the matter. He will be accompanying us now or risk expulsion from the Family Weasley." Arthur stated strongly, directing the last part of his statement towards his youngest son.

Ron for once was speechless. He looked pleadingly at his mother for help. He had never seen her look so determined in his life. His brothers wore much the same look and he knew then he didn't have much of a choice. It weighed heavily on him, but he knew he couldn't be banished from his family. Never in all its existence had a Weasley been thrown out. Distanced from the family, like Percy had been acceptable, but not banished. Even though they didn't have much money or anything else for that matter, the Weasley's had always maintained a certain high regard in the wizarding world. Without that, he'd have nothing upon which to build his future. The gold Dumbledore had been paying him wouldn't be enough to overcome the stigma of being cast out of his family. He'd have no name to recommend him when finding a job and would be looked down upon for the rest of his life. Even the great Albus Dumbledore couldn't fix that. Besides, it would only be until June. Then he could take his NEWTs and be free of everyone. Dumbledore would probably take him back under his wing. He had been his staunchest supporter and was committed to helping the Order.

Resigned to his fate for now, he turned looking for Hermione, but she was no where in sight.

Upon hearing the Minister's explanation, Hermione ran to the library hoping to find evidence that backed up the Minister's claim. She

headed straight to Madame Pince as she didn't have time to look for herself.

"Madame Pince," she breathed trying to catch her breath. "I need a tome outlining the newest laws passed by the Wizengamot."

"Fifty fourth row, 3rd bookshelf, bottom row." She answered without looking up from her cataloging.

Hermione walked as quickly as she could to where the librarian directed. Scanning the years on the bindings she found the applicable tome and started searching through it. Sure enough, the Minister was correct and Dumbledore had twisted things to suite his personal desires. But why? What did Dumbledore want with Ron?

Ron hung his head in embarrassment as he was escorted out by his family. The Minister and her escort remained behind silently watching. It was as if they were trying to protect them all from something, but from what he couldn't quite fathom.

Once they reached the other side of the gates, his father wordlessly held out a portkey which they all touched. Reluctantly, knowing this was a turning point for him, Ron reached out and touched it as well.

He expected to arrive at the Burrow, but their destination actually took him by surprise. He had no idea why they were at the wizarding hospital, but didn't have time to think about it as his world turned black.

The Weasley's all sighed in relief when Ron succumbed to the stunner from their father. The healer's waiting for their arrival took over and placed the young man on a stretcher and carted him off in the Curse Ward. They didn't know how long it would take, so they settled themselves in to wait.

It took nearly 3 hours before a healer approached them. They were thankful that no one knew what they were doing. They were certain Dumbledore or the other Order Members would try to interfere if they did, but due to the precautions they had taken, their fears were put to

rest. At least for now they could concentrate on what the healer had to say.

“Mr. and Mrs. Weasley?”

“Yes that’s us.”

“Your son is doing fine now. It’s a wonder he was able to function normally with all the spells and potions in his system.”

“What?!” Mrs. Weasley shrieked causing her family to cringe.

“Madame, I assumed you suspected your son to be under some kind of mellifluous influence. If I had known you thought otherwise...”

“Please Healer Mandan, you are correct, but I was hoping otherwise. Have you been able to reverse the influences?”

“Ah I understand. We have been able to lift most of the spells, and the potions should be cleansed from his body within the week.”

“You said most spells, but what exactly does that mean?” Bill spoke up.

“And you are?”

“He is my oldest son and heir to the Weasley line, William Weasley. You may speak freely with any of my family.”

“How am I to be certain it wasn’t one of them that did this to your other son?”

“How dare you insinuate.....”

“Molly, please. He doesn’t know everything that’s been going on. Sir, you have my oath as the head of Family Weasley that none present here have any ill will towards Ronald.”

“Very well. The spells that remain active will need time to overcome. Time and distance from the one casting them. As I’m sure you’ve

noticed, he has some difficulty in controlling his emotions. The spells and potions worked in conjunction to compound these feelings but very gradually over time. Basically whoever did this took the seed and grew it into a tree. That in itself would not be too difficult to overcome, but the loyalty and binding spells make it more difficult. There was also a Green Envy spell that took his original feelings and turned it 10-fold. Do you understand so far?"

"Yes, please continue, is there anything we can do?." Arthur asked with rising anger.

"Well you can definitely press charges against the person who did this. Some of the potions used are border line illegal and restricted. That is if you know who did this. There is also one other thing I need to inform you of. As is customary with these kind of cases...."

"You mean you have these cases regularly?" Charlie guffawed.

"No, they are rare these days, but about 60 years ago during the time of Grindewald, they were quite common and well documented. Anyway, as I was saying, it is part of our procedure to have a mind healer present to monitor the effects the cleansing has on the patient. She found that your son has had his memory modified numerous times which only exacerbates the problem. Trying to remove all these blocks proved too difficult and would have damaged his mind so we stopped. We managed to lift a few, but your son will still have control problems."

"Oh Merlin, my poor baby." Mrs. Weasley cried.

"Madame, rest assured your son will be fine with time. I am only referring to his base feelings. They were there before all this began and he will have to learn to overcome them. Much the same as we all do as we grow and mature."

"Thank you healer Mandan. Is there anything else we should know or do to help him?"

"No, that is all. I would like to pass on a little piece of advice though. Do not coddle him. Treat him as the adult he is but be straight

forward in your interactions and explanations. Don't try to hide the situation from him, it will only hinder his development."

"Very well. Can we see him now?"

"Of course. Your son should be waking up shortly and will be ready to leave by this evening."

Shape was growing more worrisome as time seemed to pass, or not. He couldn't tell with the current state of things. All he knew was that the dragon egg was no longer in his grasp. He couldn't see anything beyond the swirling colors in front of his eyes, and he couldn't move to save himself. He didn't even know if he was in Gringotts anymore, but logically speaking, he guessed he probably was. The only indications he had of time was his grumbling stomach and the urge to relieve himself.

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